DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 488 CE 073 700

AUTHOR	Cumming, J. Joy, Ed.; van Kraayenoord, Christina E., Ed.
TITLE	Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Assessing Change. Adult Literacy Research Network.
INSTITUTION	National Languages and Literacy Inst., Melbourne (Australia).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-875578-65-X
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	156p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Language Australia Publications, level 9, 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Adult Programs; Beginning Reading; Competence; Competency Based Education; Construct Validity; Criterion Referenced Tests; Educational Environment; Educational Strategies; *Evaluation Methods; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; *Numeracy; Outcomes of Education; Reading Tests; Research Proposals; *Student Evaluation; Transfer of Training; Urban Areas; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia

ABSTRACT

This document contains eight papers from an action research program to foster good practice in adult literacy provision and policy. "Introduction" (J. Joy Cumming, Christina E. van Kraayenoord) presents an overview of the action research project and individual reports. "Assessment: Making a Difference in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Learning" (J. Joy Cumming, Christina E. van Kraayenoord) summarizes the assessment issues presented at the project seminars. The following six papers present the outcomes of the individual research projects: "Assessment as an Ongoing Feature of the Learning Environment" (Catherine Doherty, Francis Mangubhai, Joan Shearer); "Filling in the Blanks: Construct Validity Issues in the Development of Assessment Tasks for Adult Literacy Students" (Ann Kelly); "Moderation of Competency-Based Assessment: Issues and Practice in Adult Literacy and Numeracy" (John Bailey et al.); "Let's Start Reading: The Field Trial of a Computer Program as an Aid in Adult Literacy Teaching" (Maureen Mortimer); "Who's Learning from Whom: A New Teacher Explores Literacy Assessment and Teaching Strategies in an Adult Urban Classroom" (Cherie de Pinna); and "Are Literacy and Numeracy Competencies Achieved by Newstart Clients Transferred to the Clients' Real-Life Context?" (Maureen Cooper, Susan Garside). The final paper, "Writing an Action Research Proposal" (Peter Mountney) describes the focus of the program's research proposal workshops. Contains 12 references. (MN)

ED 405 488

Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Assessing Change

ADULT LITERACY RESEARCH NETWORK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2

CE073 700

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Queensland

Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Assessing Change

Edited by J. Joy Cumming and Christina E. van Kraayenoord

LANGUAGE
AUSTRALIA
The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Cumming, J. Joy, 1950 - .
Adult literacy and numeracy: assessing change

Bibliography.
ISBN 1 875578 65 X.

1. Adult education - Australia. 2. Literacy programs - Australia. 3. Numeracy - Australia. I. Van Kraayenoord, Christina E. II. Language Australia. III. Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Queensland. IV. Title.

374.0120994

Published by Language Australia Limited
ACN 051 438 825

Language Australia Publications, level 9 300 Flinders Street, Melbourne VIC 3001

CONTENTS

Introduction 1
Joy Cumming and Christa van Kraayenoord

1 Assessment: Making a difference in adult literacy and numeracy learning 8
Joy Cumming and Christa van Kraayenoord

2 Assessment as an ongoing feature of the learning environment 18
Catherine Doherty, Francis Mangubhai and Joan Shearer

3 Filling in the blanks: Construct validity issues in the development of assessment tasks for adult literacy students 52
Ann Kelly

4 Moderation of competency-based assessment: Issues and practice in adult literacy and numeracy 68
John Bailey, Pam Weston, Shirley Verrall and Jeremy Audas

5 Let's start reading 90
Maureen Mortimer

6 Who's learning from whom: A new teacher explores literacy assessment and teaching strategies in an adult urban classroom 103
Cherie de Pinna

7 Are literacy and numeracy competencies achieved by Newstart clients transferred to the clients' real-life context? 117
Maureen Cooper and Susan Garside

8 Writing an action research proposal 139
Peter Mountney

Acknowledgments

All those associated with the Language Australia - NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network in Queensland, the practitioners, academics, students and all others involved in the research projects reported in this book would like to thank Language Australia - National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia Ltd for the establishment of the Adult Literacy Research Network and the financial support that has made this work possible. In return, the National Coordinator, Rosa McKenna, the Director of the Queensland Network node, Joy Cumming, and the Steering Committee of the Queensland Network node would like to thank all those who contributed so much during the conduct of these studies.

Past and present members of the NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network (Qld) Steering Committee (* indicates current members):

Ms Maureen Cooper* Brisbane Institute of TAFE
Ms Robyn Cox* University of Central Queensland
Dr Joy Cumming (Qld Director)* Griffith University
Ms Shani Doig (Qld Coordinator)* Griffith University
Mr David Fitzgerald Queensland Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Ms Stephanie Gunn (former Qld Griffith University Coordinator)
Dr Peter Kell* James Cook University of North Qld
Ms Ann Kelly* Southbank Institute of TAFE
Ms Bobby Harreveld* Central Queensland Institute of TAFE
Professor Colin Lankshear* Queensland University of Technology
Assoc. Professor Francis Mangubhai* University of Southern Queensland
Ms Rosa McKenna (National NLLIA Coordinator)*
Dr Marion Norton* Queensland Adult Education in Adult Language, Literacy & Numeracy
Ms Carolyn Ovens* Australian Council of Trade Unions
Ms Jill Ryan (former Qld Griffith University Coordinator)
Ms Jean Searle* Griffith University
Ms Colleen Spencer* Queensland Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Committee (QATSIECC)
Ms Peggy Tidyman QATSIECC
Dr Christa van Kraayenoord The University of Queensland
Mr John Ward* Far North Queensland Institute of TAFE

Editors' notes

The formats, styles and bibliographic conventions, while internally consistent, represent the variety of conventions presented by the research teams.

INTRODUCTION

J. Joy Cumming
Christina E. van Kraayenoord

In 1995, the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) Adult Literacy Research Network (Queensland) undertook to support a program of action research. This activity was part of an agenda developed by the Network at the national level to foster the development of good practice in adult literacy provision and policy through an amalgamation of the efforts of academics, teachers and policy makers. The Queensland Network statement of aims and objectives identifies the major roles of the Network to be to support the dissemination of research into practice and to facilitate of procedures to link research and practice. Action research involving collaboration between researchers, teachers as researchers and others is becoming recognised as the most effective means to address areas of significant need identified in and by the 'field'.

A structure was developed to support such involvement in research. Firstly, the Adult Literacy Research Network Steering Committee (Queensland) noted that the area of assessment was becoming ever more important in the adult literacy and numeracy sector. Changes such as program accountability, the introduction of accredited curriculum in adult basic education and systems such as the National Reporting System require significant and demanding attention from practitioners and policy makers. The theme for the action research projects was thus set to be 'Assessment'.

A series of professional development activities was organised throughout Queensland. Seminar/workshops on the general theme of assessment were held in four locations in Queensland in April and May 1995. Christa van Kraayenoord of The University of Queensland led sessions in Townsville and Cairns, while Joy Cumming of Griffith University led sessions in Rockhampton and Brisbane. The seminars were free and open to any who wished to attend with corresponding good attendance. Many adult literacy practitioners travelled long distances at their own costs and in their own time to attend the sessions, showing how much such professionals value opportunities for professional development. Workshops on the writing of a research proposal were led by Peter Mountney of Griffith University at the same four sites. Again these were open for all to attend, although there was an expectation that those attending would have a research topic they wished to investigate through an action research project.

Following the seminars, proposals were sought from groups or individuals. The Network was pleased that in only the second year of a program of action research support, six proposals of high quality were submitted. All six were able to be funded. The amount of funding is necessarily small and quality for money has been provided in return. At this point, we would like to acknowledge and thank the contributions and efforts of all of those who have participated in these projects, whether as researchers, teachers or participants in the courses. The adult literacy and numeracy field has always been noted for its professionalism and dedication and despite a changing environment, this shows no signs of abatement.

The outcome of the action research program is presented in the following chapters. The first chapter provides a summary of the issues in assessment that were presented at our seminars. We have emphasised both in the chapter and in the seminars general assessment issues and theoretical underpinnings that all educators need to address. The issues discussed are not restricted to adult literacy and numeracy provision, to the vocational sector, or to competency-based assessment. Good assessment practice in any context requires the recognition of and adherence to the same fundamental concerns about appropriateness, validity and responsiveness to the learning goals of instruction.

The next six chapters present the outcomes of the individual research projects. In presenting these projects only very light editing has been undertaken. We hope that the value of the reports presented in their original formats is threefold. Firstly, the findings of the research studies are in themselves significant. All adult literacy practitioners will identify with some of the situations and issues discussed and resolved. Thus the studies are worthy of dissemination in their own right as research in the area of adult literacy and numeracy.

The second value of the reports is to demonstrate that educational research can be undertaken in many different ways. Today there is no one research approach that is more valued than another. What is most important is that the persons undertaking the research perceive an issue that is of significance to them and explore that issue in a systematic way.

The third value of the report chapters is the demonstration that research can also be reported in many different ways. The variety of formats, styles and orientations of the action research teams have been maintained deliberately. Different referencing systems are used. Again, this has been done to indicate clearly that it is the substance and intention of research that gives it quality. There is no one correct procedure or format that must be followed rigidly. How often are we afraid to undertake new activities (leaving aside issues of work and life demands) for fear of not knowing the 'right' way to proceed. And does this hesitation not resonate with the fears of so many adult literacy and numeracy students that they might not get it 'right'? The research papers that follow are all excellent in their own right. They address issues and concerns of importance to the research teams. They site their work in what is already known, if possible. They report their findings in systematic and well-documented ways.

The first study, reported in Chapter 2, examines the issue of assessment from a broad perspective. Catherine Doherty, Francis Mangubhai and Joan Shearer note the changing environment of adult literacy and numeracy provision and the new agendas of assessment and reporting, agendas that 'can create real conflicts for the provider'. For their study, the research team defined assessment to include both formal and informal assessment and tried to ensure that both were captured by their research. Catherine, Francis and Joan, through surveys of 37 adult literacy practitioners in Queensland, examine teacher attitudes to assessment as well as their assessment practices. The study was undertaken in the context of agendas such as the new Queensland curriculum of the Certificate of Vocational Access[1] (CNL03) and policy requirements such as system-wide reporting. Among their findings the research team note that, while the full-time and more qualified staff reported moderate levels of assessment professional development, part-time teachers and coordinators reported minimal to moderate levels. Professional development in assessment for these teachers, particularly if there is further casualisation of literacy staff, is an important consideration for the future.

Three-quarters of respondents in the study by Catherine, Francis and Joan were using curriculum with specified learning outcomes against which most were required to report on students. Most respondents indicated the use of a considerable range of assessment techniques including informal testing and with less emphasis on decontextualised skill testing. This reversed findings of previous research (Falk, 1995), and perhaps indicates that the new agendas have changed the emphasis and focus of assessment, as well as raising teachers' awareness about the diverse roles and forms of assessment. Their findings document teachers' reactions, both positive and negative, to the changes. We're sure most practitioners, in any field, reading this chapter will empathise with at least some of the comments.

The study by Catherine, Francis and Joan confirms the primacy assessment and reporting have gained in adult literacy and numeracy provision in a relatively short time. Respondents raise serious issues about formalised assessment requirements during the curriculum, impacts on students (both positive and negative) and specific issues for assessment of students with learning difficulties and disabilities.[2]

It is unlikely that assessment requirements will now diminish. The challenge is before us all to maximise the quality of our practices while we seek to minimise unnecessary duplication of activities, on behalf of both teachers and students.

Improving practice and the understanding of teachers' roles in undertaking assessment are the focus of the next two studies in the book. Ann Kelly, in conjunction with Sharon Mullins and Ruth Kemp, examined moderation and construct validity issues related to assessment in adult literacy. The framework for their study is based on the construct validity definitions emphasised by the work of Hagar, Athanasou and Gonczi (1994). Validity of assessment has traditionally been seen as having four main focuses: face, content, construct and predictive validity. Of these, construct validity, the match between an assessment activity and the performance it seeks to assess, has always been seen to be both the most important and most difficult. In our chapter on assessment, we mention new conceptions in validity emphasised by Messick (1989), conceptions that focus not only on the appropriateness of the task (that ie, traditional construct validity) but also the appropriateness of the interpretation and use of the outcomes.

While Ann and her colleagues draw upon the Queensland Certificate of Vocational Access as the data source for the study, the issues raised about specificity and breadth of assessment tasks are critical and relevant to all instructional settings. They describe and use the model proposed by Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991) to evaluate assessment in the Queensland Certificate. The model establishes eight criteria - consequences, fairness, transferability and generalisability, cognitive complexity, content quality, content coverage, meaningfulness and cost and efficiency - to be used in considering the quality of an assessment program.

The NLLIA action research grants in Queensland allowed John Bailey, Pam Weston, Shirley Verrall and Jeremy Audaus, all of the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, to interact in the development and moderation of exemplar assessment materials. Such interaction is not simple when the bases of members of one institute are spread over hundreds of kilometres. Their chapter, Chapter 3, describes briefly the diversity of characteristics of the adult literacy and numeracy students at each site.

John Bailey and his colleagues undertook to trial procedures for moderation of competency-based assessment tasks. The new Queensland curriculum (CNL03) was again the focus of their work, in particular the Personal focus modules at levels 1A and 1B.[3]
While the project team make a number of insightful reflections about the problems of matching a common competency-based curriculum to the literacy and numeracy needs and wants of individual adult learners, it is significant that so many of the studies in these chapters used the same Personal focus modules.

In their chapter, the research team of the far north Queensland Institute of TAFE describes both the processes of their deliberations as well as the outcomes. These outcomes consist of both their own conceptualisations of issues in assessment for adult literacy and numeracy teachers as well as the exemplar materials. Their statement 'these discussions were kept at a forceful yet friendly level which seemed to indicate the degree to which assessment was a contentious issue in literacy circles' is just one of those that indicate how important the opportunity to share, discuss and debate is to the educational process and professional development. Such an opportunity provided through this action research project is clearly one of the major outcomes of the research for the team. Their chapter depicts the action learning and action research process discussed in Kelly's earlier chapter. The comments and reflections about the demands of action research are well-recognised.

The integrated assessment tasks that are presented in Chapter 3 provide pro forma for innovative and meaningful assessment tasks for students. Teachers can use these as a basis for developing tasks of their own, to suit the circumstances of their students as well as the demands of the curriculum. Teachers can do this with some confidence that these would have some shared understandings among teachers of the expectations of standards of performance implicit in such tasks.

Overall the work by these teacher-researchers shows that in order to have a common curriculum with shared interpretations of student performance levels, teacher talk, trialing of tasks and moderation are necessary. As their project shows, when this occurs the outcomes are worthwhile for both the teachers and the students.

Among the research studies funded through the NLLIA Network in Queensland were two studies that looked at innovative practices and the assessment practices that flowed from them. Maureen Mortimer, in her Chapter charting student interaction with a computer literacy program, displays a keen sense of innovation in learning and assessment and empathy with student needs. Her study shows a sense of individual need for success, confidence and sometimes privacy. It provides a fine example of a teacher's self-evaluation and of action program evaluation. The data Maureen has collected not only provide us with a record of the successes of the computer program, but also are being used by Maureen to inform future modifications.

The level of sophistication of Maureen's computer program, described with complete understatement, amazes us. The outcomes of her work show that students in general greatly enjoyed the computer work. They were motivated to spend time learning with computers, they did learn, they did gain confidence and interact more with others, and they did set new and significant goals.

While the study by Maureen was an extension of the assessment theme of the work of the

NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network in Queensland in 1995 and 1996, several important assessment issues are embedded in her work and report. As Maureen notes:

- feedback that is immediate and positive is the most beneficial for students,
- success can be ensured by allowing the opportunity for students to work at their individual levels,
- learning and assessment activities should be meaningful and contextualised as far as possible,
- students enjoy academic achievement, particularly improvement against their own prior performance,
- students have the capacity to reflect on their own performance and suggest better ways to achieve their goals, and
- students find tangible results as important as positive reinforcement.

In Chapter 6, Cherie de Pinna shares another aspect of self-evaluation. Again, the self-evaluation in this study is by the teacher, not students. Her report shows a new teacher embracing all aspects of literacy performance and development indicated by current critical-cultural literacy. While her teaching work took place with a group of indigenous adult students, the principles Cherie sought to enact in her teaching are seen as the basis of all good andragogy, if not all good teaching. She looks at student participation in and management of the learning context, the sharing of understandings at pedagogical, individual and cultural levels, and the tensions, mentioned by other teacher-researchers, between individual needs in adult literacy and core curriculum. These tensions are even more difficult for the beginning teacher seeking to resolve seemingly incompatible concepts of individual competency-based assessment and holistic literacy performance. Further work such as the exemplars developed by John, Pam, Shirley and Jeremy in Chapter 3 should help bridge this gap.

The extracts from Cherie's journal highlight common problems and issues encountered in adult literacy and numeracy provision. Not least of these is the development of a real or authentic context for outcomes that while emulating life or the workplace, are still artificial in the formal education setting. She also wanted to develop learner responsibility and a positive group dynamic to enhance learning. The brief report provided by the students and their comments show that a realistic context of meetings and fund-raising was established. Overall, we thank Cherie for undertaking a critical self-reflection that we so often ask of others, but would prefer not to do for ourselves. She shares with us her successes as well as some activities and plans that did not go as she had expected. Cherie also justly reminds us that we learn from each other, and only by being willing to learn and to understand, can we reach our own goals.

The final research study report in Chapter 7 examines adult literacy assessment in the context of longterm student gains. When we assess in any educational or work setting, we are making judgements about performance. Underlying any act of assessment is the belief that the achievement we denote through assessment is enduring. As Maureen Cooper and Susan Garside of the Bayside campus of the Moreton Institute of TAFE indicate in this chapter, it is also the hope of teachers or assessors that the performance indicated by assessment will transfer to a situation of use – whether it be the abstraction of mathematical problem-solving or the specifics of work tasks. Maureen and Susan have explored this very issue: the match and transfer of literacy and numeracy competencies acquired in a formal training course to the workplace.

Once again, as the context of the study was in a Queensland TAFE setting, the focus of the study was the Queensland Certificate in Vocational Access, in its 1995 accredited form. Maureen and

Susan provide a succinct review of issues in general literacy and numeracy education and transfer of skills that should be informative for all practitioners. These are complex issues to which we still have so few answers but clearly are at the core of all education and training.

Maureen and Susan followed ten students who had completed a Newstart program. Some were in employment, some were seeking work, or were working part-time, others were in a new course with a work experience component. Comprehensive data from a range of stakeholders, particularly from work supervisors, former teachers and Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) case managers, were collected. We're sure most readers will find the 'critical incident' accounts from the participants heart-warming and enlightening, both in terms of the outcomes and the methodology. The participants are able to provide many instances of their use and transfer of the literacy and numeracy skills developed through the Newstart programs. Their data indicate that this success may be due, at least in part, to emphasis placed by the Newstart program teachers on cognitive factors such as repeated practice and practice in multiple contexts, as well as learning factors such as independence, high expectations of self and others, responsibility for learning and willingness 'to have a go'. These latter attributes were identified by the employers interviewed as having as much importance as specific skills.

Maureen and Susan raise the issue of assessment of the affective domain as this is seen to be so important. Now that we are addressing so many of the difficult issues in assessment, the assessment of attitudes and other affective attributes could be the next focus. Again their study reinforces our hypothesis that many students, including adults, need not only a sense of achievement, but a clear indication of what they have achieved.

Finally, Chapter 8 of this book on the action research program of the NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network in Queensland presents the focus of the research proposal workshops conducted by Peter Mountney. Peter provides a practical guide for any who wish to consider how to design and plan a small action research project. We provide this Chapter in the hope that many adult literacy and numeracy teachers and policy makers will be further enthused to participate in such action research studies. It is only through these continued activities that we can identify and resolve issues that are significant for practitioners, and can help to develop best practice in provision through the amalgamation of strong theoretical and empirical evidence.

References

Australian Committee for Training Curriculum (ACTRAC) (1993). *National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence*. Frankston, Victoria: ACTRAC Productions Ltd.

Coates, S., Fitzpatrick, L., McKenna, A. & Makin, A. (1995). *National Reporting System*. Canberra: DEET, Brisbane: ANTA.

Falk, I. (1995). *Comparison and evaluation of adult literacy assessment practices*. Australian Language and Literacy Policy National Project. Canberra: DEET.

Hagar, P., Anthanasou, J. & Gonczi A. (1994). *Assessment: Technical manual*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Linn, R. L., Baker, E. L. & Dunbar, S. B. (1991). Complex, performance-based assessment: Expectations and validation criteria. *Educational Researcher*, 20(8), 15-21.

Messick, S. (1989). Validity, In R. L. Linn (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (3rd ed.) New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan.

J. Joy Cumming
Griffith University

Christina E. van Kraayenoord
The University of Queensland

Footnotes

1 One of the major changes throughout Australia over the last ten years has been the development in every state of accredited certificates of basic education and vocational access. The certificate programs now legitimate and recognise basic education for adults and allow adults pathways to further studies.

2 It is worth commenting here that one goal during the development of the National Reporting System was to ensure that even small changes for such students can be seen as significant progress.

3 Levels 1A and 1B indicate beginning level proficiency within the curriculum document CNL03. The Personal focus is derived from the influence of the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (ACTRAC, 1993) with identifies six aspects of communication or contexts through which communication takes place. These are: Procedural, Technical, Personal, Cooperative, Systems and Public communication. This construction of communication settings has supported the development of curriculum that identify different areas of focus according to student needs and skills. The Personal focus modules at this level equate to the type of work which has always been undertaken in beginning adult basic education in previously informal instruction. The advantage of such a formal curriculum is that it therefore allows formal accreditation and articulation of all education achievement.

ASSESSMENT: MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY LEARNING

J. Joy Cumming
Christina E. van Kraayenoord

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the themes of assessment that underpin the research projects reported in the following chapters. These themes were introduced in and emerged from professional development workshops with adult literacy and numeracy practitioners in Queensland during 1995. Throughout these workshops, the following definition of assessment was used.

> *Assessment is the process of making judgements of performance, in a number of situations, using a variety of different techniques, over time. Assessment is a way of collecting information. Assessment is not an isolated activity, but a continuous process. The purposes of assessment are to inform instruction and report progress.*

This definition encompasses the diversity of ways in which assessment can be both undertaken and used. Assessment can be used for diagnostic, formative and summative purposes, as well as for providing information for reporting and evaluation.

The definition also reflects changes that have occurred over the past decade in assessment theory and practice, changes explored in the following discussion. The next sections of the chapter examine five general assessment issues: contextual factors; reasons for changes in literacy assessment; the effects on practice of these changes; their implications for teachers; and future issues.

Contextual factors contributing to an increased focus on assessment in adult literacy and numeracy

Adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia has undergone a number of significant changes in recent years. Historically, adult literacy and numeracy instruction originated through the work of community and volunteer agencies in community centres, libraries, and tutors' and students' homes. Instruction tended to be individual or in small groups, and was provided to meet personal goals and needs. This work still continues today. However, International Literacy Year in 1990 was a turning point for the quantity and nature of adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia. Various lobby groups for adult literacy and numeracy ensured that International Literacy Year received wide public attention, with a number of policy and language statements and research initiatives ensuing. This attention, and subsequent recognition of unmet need, led to a considerable increase in state and federal funding and provision in adult literacy and numeracy.

Coincident with these initiatives, major changes were occurring in the organisation of the Australian workforce. Award restructuring and enterprise agreements were introduced to facilitate the development of and to broaden workers' skills. Demarcation of jobs and tasks was reduced. The rationale for these changes was an expectation that workers would become more skilled, and hence able to move between jobs more easily or to advance in any sector - so creating a 'clever country'. At the same time, the nature of jobs themselves changed, with demands for higher literacy skills to cope with technological developments, increased paper work, and training itself. Literacy was therefore perceived, by those internal and external to the workplace, as an integral component of the transition process for workers. Specific vocational and literacy skills were taught via workplace training. Funding for such training was increased by the introduction of the Training Levy on large companies, as well as initiatives such as Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) funding.

The recognition of literacy as an important factor in success in work, combined with high unemployment rates, also led to an increasing emphasis on and provision of literacy and numeracy instruction in labour market programs for the unemployed. Differences in provision in community basic education, vocational and workplace training started to blur, with the same teachers, often from technical and further education (TAFE) institutions, instructing in all sectors.

The dramatic rise in provision over the past decade is directly tied to improvements in state and federal funding for such programs, paid from the public purse. With increases in funding came strong and insistent demands for accountability. In the past, information about accountability has been satisfied by raw and questionable figures: numbers of students beginning and completing programs, numbers of students getting jobs or going to further training, and cost efficiency per 'unit'. However, an important aspect of accountability should be for teachers to be able to demonstrate what students have learned as a result of their participation in training, as well as to relate these outcomes to program goals and content. The present shift towards accountability in terms of learning outcomes is not only educationally desirable, it is necessary to ensure that only high quality programs are funded.

The development of accredited curricula and competency-based assessments, and the 'recognition of prior learning' should assist teachers to meet the demands of accountability. These developments create recognised pathways for workers and students, allowing clearer articulation between levels of certification and for employment.

Many teachers in adult literacy and numeracy who have their origins in community provision and commitment to the welfare of individuals, are uncomfortable with the rapid introduction of all of these changes. However, recognition of the needs and individuality of the students is not necessarily lost. Students, themselves, need and want to know how they are achieving and about their progress through their course, as well as to have documented evidence of their learning. Accountability to the students, above everything else, is paramount.

Changes in the nature of literacy and numeracy assessment: Reasons

Several factors have led to changes in the ways in which literacy and numeracy are being assessed. Firstly, our awareness of the nature of literacy learning and factors affecting literacy performance has changed considerably in recent times. No longer is literacy seen only as the ability to decode and to comprehend written text. More recent conceptualisations of literacy take into account the constructive and interactive nature of literacy learning, focusing on the text, the task, the reader and the context. Similarly, conceptions of numeracy have evolved from notions of arithmetic and basic computation to incorporate workplace mathematics, statistical applications and understanding, and problem-solving skills. The role of language in numeracy and areas such as technological, computer and quantitative literacies are also being considered. Hence there is now an awareness of the multiplicity of literacy, or more aptly, literacies. We are all more literate with some forms of written, oral and quantitative communication than with others, and in some contexts, than in others.

Such complex conceptualisations of literacy and numeracy have necessitated a corresponding shift in the ways in which we assess adults in literacy and numeracy. Tests of unrelated words in oral reading, standardised comprehension tests, spelling tests, arithmetic sums, and so on, are no longer sufficient indicators of a student's literacy and numeracy performance. While any of these activities can still have a specific function in an assessment program,[1] their narrow focus and decontextualised nature limit their capacity to reflect what any student, particularly an adult, can do. Assessment today focuses not just on product but also on process, not just on what a student can or can't do, but why and how they do what they do. Metacognitive aspects such as learning how to learn, and reflection on learning are seen as important instructional goals and hence require some systematic observation. The context of performance and attitudinal and motivational factors, seen to be intertwined with literacy and numeracy, also need exploration.

A second major factor affecting assessment practice today relates to changes in assessment theory itself. Teachers are probably familiar with terminology such as standardised tests, formative and summative assessment, folios, reliability and validity, but may not realise that the area of assessment is a theoretical field of research in itself. Assessment theory has evolved from psychological theories of measurement (psychometrics) to educationally-based conceptions of assessment of student achievement. Validity of assessment is always seen as the critical factor for good practice. Psychometric test development depends on quantitative indicators of reliability and validity obtained from results for groups. These indicators are measures of the coherence of the test itself, rather than rather than focusing on the appropriateness of the proposed assessment relevant to the proposed learning goals of the individual. More importantly most psychometric tests are designed to measure theoretical attributes and underlying abilities. However, the validity of the test for actually 'measuring' an attribute is rarely established beyond face validity, the items on the test 'look' appropriate.

In contrast, assessment of student achievement has become more concerned with the direct observation of skills, knowledge and attitudes demonstrated during a course of instruction and in assessment situations, that is, performance-based assessment. Performance assessment in literacy and numeracy involves observing the behaviours and motivations of students, and making judgements about the work they produce in response to various written, visual and spoken stimuli. Today, valid assessment is no longer established by 'good' psychometric indicators, but by assessment appropriate to the context, the outcomes of which are interpreted and used appropriately (Messick, 1989).

Using this definition of validity, we can see that the best literacy and numeracy assessment practices are going to be those that are the most appropriate assessment activities for the learning context and purpose. We noted in the Introduction that assessment serves many purposes. A single assessment activity may not be suitable for multiple purposes. Formative assessment is used to provide feedback to both teacher and student about learning progress. The examination of students' processes when involved in literacy and numeracy activities can be as important as observing the outcomes of the activities. Such information is immediately useful for the modification of teaching and for the student to be able to set future learning goals.

Summative assessment can involve the observation and rating of performance on an assessment task or activity, as well as the aggregation of assessment outcomes to provide information for certification. Summative assessment serves as an indication of performance standards achieved. In most contexts, summative assessment will report on the quality and complexity of literacy and numeracy produced, such as writing a report, or providing a logical solution for a mathematical activity. There is, however, scope to incorporate information on strategic outcomes as well, such as development of a strategy using context cues in reading rather than sounding out a word, or estimating reasonableness of answers in mathematical tasks. Thus, adult literacy and numeracy practitioners should see the collection and use of both formative and summative information about students as important.

Changes in literacy and numeracy assessment: Effect on practice

Changes in conceptions of literacy and numeracy and in assessment have necessarily affected the practice of teachers in the adult literacy and numeracy field. Performance can change according to context, and therefore literacy and numeracy have to be assessed across a range of activities. Prior knowledge, contexts of performance under speed or stress conditions, work demands and appropriateness of a task can all affect performance at any time.

Literacy is seen to involve at the very least the four macro skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as critical thinking across all of these. Viewing[2] has also recently appeared in some definitions of literacy. Comprehensive literacy assessment must incorporate all of these areas. Within each of these areas, performance is also complex. For example, Freebody and Luke (1990) have identified four components of reading performance related to reader roles as: text decoders, text participants, text users and text analysts. These authors see all of these components as essential for fluent 'reading', while none on its own is sufficient. In the past, teachers may have emphasised only one or two roles such as text decoder or text participant in both instruction and assessment. Adult literacy and numeracy practioners need to ensure that readers become competent in all of these roles. Work in numeracy is following similar directions (Johnston, 1994). The ability of adults to act as critical users of mathematics is seen to be as important as the capacity to compute. The development of appropriate assessment procedures to examine these roles in literacy and numeracy is the next important step.

Writing is no less complex an activity than reading. However, teachers often limit their comments on students' proficiency in writing to consideration of the quantity and the surface lexical-syntactic features of the written text. Instead, teachers need to consider a range of expectations related to writing, including the use of the appropriate genre, and taking into account the audience, and achievement of the purpose. These expectations should be made clear to the students.

Speaking and listening should receive instructional and assessment attention. To date there has been little research on appropriate assessment approaches for adults in these domains. However, we believe that students should be assessed to identify how they interact in a variety of situations with a ranges of audiences and purposes. Students' abilities to control linguistic structures and features of spoken language, and their abilities to listen to, monitor, and critically reflect on their own and others communication should also be examined.

Assessment in numeracy needs to focus on newer conceptions of numeracy and mathematics, including problem-solving and thinking skills. The development and assessment of the latter skills should be promoted, with a reduced emphasis on learning of arithmetic and computational skills. Just as literacy performance is influenced by context, so too are mathematical behaviours. Research has shown that we approach and construct apparently similar mathematical tasks in different ways in different contexts. Performance is usually enhanced in context. Therefore instructional and assessment practices need to be clearly related to the appropriate contexts, for example, a specific workplace, so that the situational demands can be taken into consideration.

Consideration of good assessment practice encompasses many issues. Firstly, the first Assessment Principle of the National Reporting System (NRS) (Coates et al., 1995) recommends that as wide a range of tasks as possible be used. Such tasks can include open-ended formats, where students structure and present information, as well as closed-formats, where students are completing a more restricted activity. Assessment can be undertaken through both written and oral activities. Often adult literacy and numeracy students can display knowledge and skills more easily in an oral than in a written format. Conversely, students from a non-English speaking background can find written presentations more enabling of performance than oral presentations.

Secondly, conditions of assessment will also differ. The time and resources available for an activity can be varied, on a continuum from limited to unspecified, to suit the instructional and assessment goals. Students with special needs and with English as a second language may require extra time to complete their work. Task and text can be modified to match the abilities or characteristics of students. Assessment can be embedded within instructional activities or completed on conclusion of instruction. In ideal situations, assessment and instruction are so integrated that it is not possible to distinguish between instructional and assessment activities.

Most importantly, assessment is not a one-off activity, but should be based on multiple assessment activities through continuous assessment or approaches such as folio or portfolio assessment. A folio reflects a student's performance and progress over time. It is constructed from different types of evidence representative of the curriculum goals and objectives. The contents of a folio should be systematically organised, so that changes in learning can be tracked. Folios should also be reviewed frequently so that students become conscious of what they have achieved, and can develop new learning goals.

Does this mean that all performance based assessment activities are good assessment and that all assessment activities should be collated in a folio? No. Assessment is not a random activity. It has to be ongoing and systematic, matching key curriculum goals and assessment purposes. A teacher cannot assess everything, and therefore must choose to assess essential dimensions of literacy and numeracy performance in a course. Choices are also made when using folio assessment. Some exemplary folio practices allow students to select their pieces of work in collaboration with their teachers. These pieces are chosen to suit the purpose of the folio. It may be: to show latest and best work; to show diversity through the inclusion of many different pieces of work: or to show the development that has occurred through the inclusion of early as well as later work.

Adult literacy and numeracy teachers are often unhappy about making judgements about students' work, for fear of appearing critical or affecting student self-esteem. However, performance can be judged in several ways: against self, against others and against specified criteria. Adult literacy and numeracy teachers frequently negotiate goals and curriculum content with adult learners. Working from these goals, the students, with the teacher, can chart their progress against their own goals. An advantage of this approach is not only that the student is able to control and have ownership of learning, but also that the reflective act of self-assessment should enhance learning.

Judgement against the performance of others is usually referred to as normative assessment. While this may have negative connotations for many teachers and students, situations can occur where it is appropriate. At times, such as for diagnostic purposes, it may be beneficial to know that a student's performance on a common task is equivalent to that of only a small percentage of the population and highly atypical. Normative or ranking decisions are also necessary for entry to courses and institutions such as universities or the awarding of scholarships. Normative comparisons are simple (deceptively) when based on a percentage, a score or a single letter. However these comparisons are more difficult when based on complex assessment outcomes such as folios and aggregated outcomes. While there are problems to be addressed, folio assessments have been used successfully to make normative comparisons.

Criterion-referenced assessment where performance is judged against explicit criteria has grown in popularity. In this approach, performance is judged against criteria that are made explicit. In the best implementations of criterion-referenced assessment, standards for the criteria are also provided (Sadler, 1987). The benefits of criterion-referenced assessment are not only that the goals and expectations are known to the students, but also that all students can achieve at the highest level of performance. Knowledge of the criteria and standards allows students to self-monitor their performance.

Competency-based assessment can be regarded as a specific form of criterion-referenced assessment. It involves the identification of competencies that the student is stated to have achieved or have not yet achieved. In some instances, progress towards the competency can also be recorded. Competencies and criteria are not necessarily of the same order. A competency generally describes an act, behaviour, or performance. A criterion can describe a quality or element of performance. It is most likely that adult literacy and numeracy teachers will develop more and more sophisticated descriptors of criteria for contextual and encompassing performance-based assessment activities. The National Framework for Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (ACTRAC, 1993) already provides a rich framework from which aspects and levels of performance can be drawn and the National Reporting System (NRS) (Coates et al., 1995) provides an equally rich system to which outcomes can be mapped. It is envisaged that in the future assessment exemplars will provide further elaborations of appropriate criteria, descriptors, and standards.

Implications of changes for teachers and program planners

The discussions thus far indicate that assessment in the Australian adult literacy and numeracy context is an area that needs serious attention. Accountability to funders, institutions, other teachers and students is an expectation which at first glance may appear a bureaucratic imposition, but which in practice will ensure quality provision. From an instructional perspective, accountability for student learning is best demonstrated through the use of appropriate, sensitive and diverse assessment.

Good assessment must be integrated with curricula that reflect the comprehensive definitions of literacy and numeracy accepted today. The curricula deal with all aspects of learning, not just objectives related to the acquisition of reading, writing, or computation skills. Curricular goals should include motivational, attitudinal, cognitive and metacognitive components. They should take into account the cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences of the students, but with the proviso that the goals and assessment should match the needs of the student learning group. Teachers should not presume on behalf of students. For example, students whose goal is to complete a Public Service Examination will need to develop 'standard' Australian English, even as a second language, in order to be able to complete a formal and timed test. Assessment in this context will include diagnostic and formative assessment to guide effective instruction in the acquisition of 'standard' English, but should also include test-taking practice.

Good assessment has to be congruent with the resources and materials that are found in classrooms or training sites. A range of genres, materials with different difficulty levels, and relevant forms and documentation should be incorporated into the assessment tasks. Materials should be selected so that students can make use of their prior knowledge, as well as their awareness of the conventions of texts. Support materials such as dictionaries, thesauruses, calculators, and the like should also be available in assessment situations.

A documented and planned approach towards assessment is essential for good assessment. Not only will this ensure that assessment is systematic, appropriate and matched to curriculum goals and resources, but also ensure that teachers have opportunities to reflect on their instructional and assessment practices. Such reflection allows teachers to evaluate what they are doing and to review learners' goals so that modifications can be made. Both planning and reflection assist with the development of meaningful descriptions and profiles of students' learning for reporting procedures. Documentation and planning of assessment provide mechanisms by which teachers can discuss assessment issues with each other.

We do not underestimate the demands and time consuming nature of these types of assessment practices. However, assessment plays a significant role in the work of the adult literacy and numeracy teacher. It is estimated that in primary and secondary schools, teachers spend twenty percent of their time in assessment activities. Most of the effort for teachers in developing improved and effective assessment in the adult literacy and numeracy sector will be in the initial phases during which innovative and comprehensive assessment strategies are planned. Thereafter systems and procedures can be put into place which ensure that assessment becomes part of the routine programming cycle.

Teachers can lighten the load by sharing planning, materials and assessment tasks with each other. They should also seek forums where they can discuss matters relating to assessment and gain information about the best and most recent initiatives in adult literacy and numeracy assessment practice. The action research projects presented here describe investigations of assessment issues that concern teachers, the outcomes of the projects, and their authors' deliberations and conclusions. This publication is one attempt to try to share, and lighten the load of teachers by discussing innovations and considerations in assessment practice.

Issues in assessment for the future

During this discussion we have touched on a number of issues that are already confronting teachers in adult literacy and numeracy sites. However, several other issues are beginning to emerge or will need to be addressed in the future.

Firstly, the implementation of assessment practices that we have described, such as continuous assessment and folio approaches to assessment, require the development by teachers of comprehensive systems of documentation. The National Reporting System (Coates et al., 1995) to be used in federally-funded programs will also require documentation of outcomes. Teachers will have to explore how efficient documentation can be balanced with their workloads.

As we noted previously, the direction of assessment towards performance-based and folio assessment introduces requirements to moderate work for comparability. The role of reporting mechanisms such as the National Reporting System is to allow common reporting frameworks for different types of provision and to accommodate different types of learners. Such systems are not meant to specify common assessment tasks. Therefore, in order to be able to relate assessment activities and outcomes, teachers need to be able to judge the equivalence both of assessment tasks and of ratings they give to performance on those tasks. Moderation is regarded as the most suitable mechanism by which this can occur. Moderation is a procedure whereby teachers, and students if appropriate, discuss together examples of assessment tasks and student performance to consider their equivalence. Moderation can occur within one provision site and across sites. For example, two teachers or more could get together to examine how they came to their judgements of a student's performance based on folio contents. Although moderation is being introduced for many general certificates of education few teachers have had experience in this area. These skills will need to be developed and refined in the future.

Thirdly, the introduction of new and more comprehensive systems of assessment will create a diverse set of questions regarding the ethics of assessment at the assessment task, student and institution levels. A teacher will always have to make decisions about the appropriateness of assessment tasks for adult literacy and numeracy students. This requires thinking about equity, fairness and the consequences of the tasks. Students need to be aware that they are being assessed and of the purposes of assessment. How the information about their achievement will be used should also be provided to students, as well as the outcomes of students' assessments. These matters require that literacy and numeracy providers examine how such information will be made available to students in a moral and socially just manner.

A growing press towards cross-institutional comparisons, particularly for funding purposes, will add new strains to the ethical responsibilities of teachers and the administration of institutions. An emphasis by all teachers on quality provision, and quality assessment, substantial documentation as a basis for clear reporting, and moderation should help to avoid inequitable comparisons. We will always need to remind funding bodies that the adult literacy and numeracy students in greatest need of instruction may make very small gains at various times. Yet it is with these students that the outcomes will eventually be most beneficial for our society and ourselves. It will not be an equitable or sensible outcome if funding is directed only at those who are high achievers.

We share the concerns of the adult literacy and numeracy communities that the increased emphasis on workplace, vocational and training programs, and associated accountability and reporting, will further displace community provision in adult literacy and numeracy. A real danger exists that the essential personalised, individualised characteristics of community provision will disappear with such a push. Guidelines need to be made explicit for community providers about the extent to which they will need to conform to accountability and assessment requirements.

Finally, in all areas of education, the need for both preservice and inservice professional development in assessment theory and practices in literacy and numeracy is great. Authorities should not expect such changes as have occurred to be implemented without intensive and adequate professional development that is periodically updated and reviewed. Through our own assessment workshops in 1995, we have become aware of the demand. The commitment by teachers to undertake such professional development even within their own time, and requiring considerable travel, is evident. State departments of education and vocational training, universities and training institutions must be responsive to these needs.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have only touched briefly on a number of significant factors affecting assessment theory and conceptions of literacy and numeracy, as well as the impact of these for adult literacy and numeracy assessment and reporting practice. Our goal has been to show that, while in the midst of dramatic and awesome changes, it is a time of opportunity to explore exiting and innovative assessment practices that enhance both the effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy instruction and the demonstration of what students can do.

The following chapters reflect the opportunities taken by adult literacy and numeracy practitioners to explore some of these issues through action research.

References

Australian Committee for Training Curriculum (ACTRAC). (1993). *National framework of adult English language, literacy and numeracy competence*. Frankston, Victoria: ACTRAC Productions Ltd.

Coates, S., Fitzpatrick, L., McKenna, A. & Makin, A. (1995). *National Reporting System: A mechanism for reporting adult English language, literacy and numeracy indicators of competence*. Canberra: DEET; Brisbane: ANTA.

Freebody, P. & Luke, A. (1990). 'Literacies' programs: Debates and demands in cultural context. *Prospect*, 5(3), 7-16.

Johnston, B. (1994). Critical numeracy? *Fine Print*, 16(4), 32-35.

Messick, S. (1989). Validity. In R. L. Linn (Ed.), *Educational measurement* (3rd ed.). New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan.

Sadler, D.R. (1987). Specifying and promulgating achievement standards. *Oxford Review of Education*, 13, 191-209.

J. Joy Cumming
Griffith University

Christina E. van Kraayenoord
The University of Queensland

Footnotes

1 Diagnostic assessment used to indicate the student's strengths and weaknesses and particularly to set directions for instruction, may incorporate both psychologically and educationally-based assessment procedures. Teachers must always be wary, however, of limitations in performance on a task affected by decontextualisation.

2 Viewing refers to the ability to construct meaning from visual texts, to interpret visual symbols and conventions, and to understand and critically evaluate the relationships between texts, viewers, contexts, and creators of texts.

ASSESSMENT AS AN ONGOING FEATURE OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Catherine Doherty
Francis Mangubhai
Joan Shearer

ABSTRACT: This study looks at the change in assessment practices within the adult literacy field in response to wider training reform agendas, and the tensions created between required practice and attitudes about assessment inherent to the field, in particular in regard to more formal assessment practices. A postal questionnaire about assessment practices and attitudes received 37 responses from adult literacy practitioners throughout Queensland, and demonstrated that the field has developed a wide range of assessment practices, both formal and informal, though attitudes regarding formal practices are still largely negative or guarded. Professional development specifically in assessment strategies is shown to be the most influential factor in facilitating the transition between the traditional and the new accredited cultures of provision.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
The authors would like to acknowledge the interest, support and assistance given to the project by Dorothy Lloyd and other staff of the Language and Literacy Section of the Toowoomba College of TAFE. The authors would also like to acknowledge their appreciation of the time and thought given by those adult literacy practitioners who responded to the survey.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A CHANGING SCENARIO

The face of adult literacy provision has changed substantially over the last fifteen years, as it has been gradually drawn into wider training and economic agendas. Traditionally, adult literacy occupied a marginalised niche characterised by voluntarism, and driven by social justice concerns (Dymock 1994). With growing recognition of the role literacy and numeracy competencies play in industry training, or as a barrier to employment, adult literacy has won a place on centre stage of the mainstream national training agenda. The spotlight has brought the benefits of additional funding, and research effort, but there has also been a compromise of the field's independence with the imposition of mainstream agendas, such as accreditation of curricula, accountability to funding sources and the introduction of competency-based training.

The area in which these wider agendas have had the most obvious impact is on assessment practices and reporting requirements. Falk (1995) is critical of the field's inability to separate 'assessment' from 'reporting' functions, implying that they should be viewed as separate domains. Whether or not this lack of distinction is problematic is open to debate. The practice of reporting to whomever necessitates assessment, that is, that a judgement be made on what learning has been taken place, with perhaps some predictive sense of what the student will subsequently be capable of. For the purpose of this study, assessment and reporting will be treated as interdependent functions (see also Cope et al. 1995: 4-5).

Formerly, adult literacy provision was characteristically in programs that were student-centred and needs-based with an underlying social welfare philosophy of promoting students' self-confidence. These individualised programs were assessed or informed by informal negotiated evaluation of objectives, progress and content (Falk 1995: 17). The purpose of assessment was to inform the learning partnership of teacher and student, with generally no accountability requirements to outside parties.

These practices contrast sharply with the expectations of the current Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) funded literacy programs for unemployed clients, whereby providers must report back to a third party with vested interests - the funding agency who commissioned the course. For this purpose, outcomes of individual students are mapped against a supplied profile of competence. Cope et al. (1995: 42) characterise these judgements as 'high-stake' assessments, whereby 'unreliable assessment ... can have serious consequences for the life chances of the individual concerned'. Competency-based curricula explicitly specify learning outcomes and performance criteria at a range of levels. Though flexible to a degree in implementation, these curriculum-driven, externally accountable programs are quite different in spirit and practice from the former responsive adult literacy provision.

Adult literacy provision has many faces, ranging from local community-based provision typically by volunteer tutor scheme, learning support and integrated provision in Skillshare centres, to increasingly professionalised provision based in TAFE colleges and private training providers. Not all sectors are currently subject to rigorous assessment expectations. However, with the development of the National Reporting System to commence in 1997 amongst nominated sectors, the plan is to gradually include all sectors so the field can share a common language and reporting tool to enhance articulation and portability. Thus all providers will eventually face scrutiny of their assessment/reporting processes.

To date, these changes have largely been imposed from above, as opposed to developing from within the field. Other external agendas have effectively set the tone and direction for developments. This resulted in what Sanguinetti (1994:3) terms 'confronting discourses'.

> Discourses of competitiveness and human capital theory challenge 'social justice' discourses; discourses of efficiency and competency-based training confront discourses of critical literacy, progressivism and holistic, learner-centred pedagogies.

The external agendas are not necessarily informed by an understanding of the nature of language learning or literacy development and can create real conflicts for the provider.

> Teachers are confronting the conflict between their pedagogical practices and commitments and the requirements of competency-based assessment which are constructed within a very different set of discourses that those which have constructed their pedagogical understandings and practices in the past. (Sanguinetti 1994:41)

This raises the question of how these 'conscripts' are coping in their changing environment.

1.2 THE EVOLUTION OF ASSESSMENT IN ADULT LITERACY

Past attempts to institute shared reporting frameworks in adult literacy, and their reception by the field, demonstrate a gradual if grudging acceptance over time of such requirements (see Cope et al. 1995: 23-32 for a chronological description of the various stages). Though not designed as assessment instruments, but rather tools for reporting outcomes, profile frameworks such as the 'Global Profiles' and the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Competency (ALAN) Scales were highly controversial when proposed. The heated response they evoked was possibly more to do with the general issue of whether or not the field was willing to assess their students for an external audience, than with the relative merits of each tool. Their rejection led to the creation of the Interim Literacy Curriculum Matrix (ILCM) in 1991 to map curricula and aid student placement in labour market programs. It is significant that the National Reporting System will replace this 'interim' measure in 1997, only after the profession has had time to actively contribute to the reporting agenda, and respond with a framework that is informed by, and compatible with, pedagogical principles of the field.

While the field has been gradually convinced that it is possible to distil a workable generic profile schema to suit various reporting audiences, the parallel development of competency-based training (CBT) policy has also made its impact. Competency-based training in general is characterised by its criterion-referenced assessment methodology.

> Assessment in competency-based training system has formalised the relationship between curriculum and assessment. Assessment is fundamentally linked to the competencies in the curriculum. (Cope et al. 1995: 48)

In practice, the move to CBT curricula has meant a forced departure from holistic, negotiated assessment practices that captured non-linguistic outcomes, such as improved student confidence and motivation, and the move to a detailed analysis of student competencies against specified learning outcomes.

There is considerable tension between the 'conflicting discourses' of competency-based training and literacy development. There is debate as to whether it is necessary to fragment or itemise literacy competencies to the degree to which current curricula such as the Victorian Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) have, or whether it is possible to devise and assess against more generic competencies that reflect the pervasiveness of literacy practices (see Sanguinetti, 1995:41). Competency-based training implicitly operates on a serial or step model of learning whereby the learner accrues a collection of complementary competencies. In contrast, language learning and literacy development curricula favour a spiralling model where base line understandings are constantly revisited and developed to new levels of complexity and sophistication. Regardless of whether CBT practices are compatible with language learning principles, the move to competency-based curricula has focussed attention on assessment as a feature of the learning environment and drawn literacy provision into the mainstream training agenda.

1.3 CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

For the purposes of this study, assessment was defined as any process or procedure whereby judgments are formed of a student's degree of competence, strengths or weaknesses, or of his/her progress towards the objectives of a learning program.

This definition thus includes both 'formal' and 'informal' assessment techniques. These terms are widely used but their boundaries are often blurred in application. Falk (1995) used the terms but did not attempt to define them, though he concludes that there is a disappointing equating of 'assessment' with 'formal assessment' amongst his respondents, who generally dismiss or fail to recognise informal assessment practices.

Adult literacy practitioners have always been involved in assessment, in particular, initial diagnostic assessment, and ongoing formative assessment for program negotiation and student feedback. These assessments were typically informal, in that they avoided test-like situations, or exit-point assessment that were enshrined in scores or ranking. This avoidance was usually fuelled by a concern to protect the budding self-confidence of the student from any sense of failure or inadequacy.

To capture the full range of assessment practices, including the informal, in this study we attempted to distinguish formal and informal assessment explicitly as follows.

Formal assessment takes place when:

- assessment is planned and undertaken consciously by the teacher;
- the outcomes are systematically recorded, to inform any reporting requirements;
- the same assessment is applied to all students in the program, under similar conditions;
- students are aware that they are being assessed.

Informal assessment takes place when:

- ongoing cumulative judgements and feedback on student progress are derived from incidental observation and participation in the learning activities of the program;
- the outcomes may not be recorded, but add to the teacher's incremental mental picture of the student's performance;
- students may not be aware that judgements are being made;
- assessment judgements are made in contextualised interactions, which may differ between students.

By these definitions, formal assessment would include test or exam-like procedures, but also systematic collection of samples of work, targeted and recorded observations of student performance, and recorded self-evaluations by students. 'Formal' assessment is distinct from 'standardised' testing, which is statistically validated testing against established norms, independent of the learning context.

Falk (1995), in his evaluation of assessment practices in adult literacy provision, was critical of the limited extent and quality of the assessment practices observed. He reported a lack of overall cogent assessment regimes, an imbalance between the considerable effort devoted to initial diagnostic testing, and the paucity of formal summative feedback to students. He also considered that the formal assessment that was happening was over-reliant on outdated, decontextualised skill testing. He attributes these deficiencies to inadequate resourcing, the increasing casualisation of literacy employment, and recruitment from school-trained teachers. He reports positive developments in addressing assessment in competency-based programs, though he feels such CBT assessment can suffer from simplistic interpretation. Though he criticised the providers for devaluing informal methods such as the ongoing looking over the shoulder (1995: 220), the mini-study of teacher judgements was disappointingly curtailed and inconclusive. In addition, his survey instruments tapped conscious and planned assessment regimes, and did not really encourage examination of the informal, less conscious data gathering that informs teacher judgements.

Cope et al. (1995) highlight the role moderation practices can and should play in assessment strategies, for intra- and inter-program purposes. Moderation networks were seen to act as safeguards to ensure the reliability of assessment processes, and perhaps more importantly, as venues for constructive criticism and collaboration in the face of imposed change from above. Sanguinetti (1994: 36) reports that some teachers found the exposure threatening, but the reports stress that moderation processes are an essential part of any assessment strategy.

1.4 ATTITUDES TO ASSESSMENT

While the assessment duties required of adult literacy practitioners have changed, have their underlying attitudes changed in accordance? Are they converted and willing participants in the new assessment regimes, or are they reluctant participants who are yet to be convinced of the validity and benefits of more formalised assessment and reporting formats? How does any conflict between attitudes and designated duties affect their assessment practices?

The literature suggests that there is considerable friction between attitudes and required assessment practices. Falk (1995: xvi) describes a pervading negative attitude to assessment, based on outdated perceptions of what constitutes assessment.

> Because of the negative feelings towards assessment, derived ... from unfortunate personal recollections of formal examinations and testing on behalf of the teachers and co-ordinators, staff appeared to explicitly avoid dealing with assessment as a relevant educational process.

Sanguinetti (1994) reports that there is considerable frustration amongst adult literacy teachers accountable to the Victorian CGEA, who have found their programs hijacked or driven by the CBT assessment agenda, and that the system disallows the intuitive assessment practices that in the literacy practitioners' view constitute their professionalism (1994: 21-24). In addition, there is dissatisfaction with the ascribed reporting tools, and their failure to depict the diversity or degree of learning achieved (Cope et al. 1995: 39).

This gap between attitudes and practices is possibly wider for the adult literacy teachers than for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL), given that the former's common rationale for resistance to formal assessment is the concern for feelings of the students undergoing assessment (Falk 1995: 128). This in turn stems from the social welfare philosophy underpinning the development of the field. The ESL student body will also include people with little or no formal education, but in addition will draw from people with varying amounts of education in their first language, and possibly different cultural expectations about the nature of learning and teaching. Cope et al. (1995: 22) cite research that shows that ESL students in general want to participate in formal assessment. Unfortunately, there was no mention of parallel research for adult literacy students. Hence the widespread assumption that they do NOT want formal assessment, and that formal assessment would in fact be detrimental to their learning process, remains unchallenged.

1.5 THE ISSUES BEHIND THIS STUDY

Dymock (1994: 64) sums up the dilemma that many practitioners now face on a daily basis:

> Being in the mainstream also means swimming with the tide - we need to be willing to go in the direction the tide is carrying us or be strong enough to swim against the current when we believe the occasion warrants it.

It was this complex interplay of factors and developments - external agendas creating conflict between the attitudes and practices of practitioners as they dance to these new tunes - that raised the questions behind this research. Just what assessment practices are being employed throughout the field? How do practitioners feel about assessment as an ongoing part of their programs? How are changing policy and requirements affecting teachers at the workface? Where are the tensions between attitudes and practice? What are the characteristics of practitioners who are comfortable (or uncomfortable) with more formal assessment requirements? What training have practitioners in the field had to facilitate the transition between paradigms? How well equipped do they feel?

2. METHODOLOGY

A postal questionnaire (Appendix 1) was developed with three general sections – characteristics of the practitioner, current assessment practices, and attitudes towards a number of issues concerning assessment. Some questions included pre-coded responses for quantitative analysis. Other open-ended questions invited comments for qualitative data. The questionnaire was piloted with part-time adult literacy staff at the Toowoomba College of TAFE.

In light of Falk's (1995) concern that only formal assessment strategies were identified as assessment, definitions of 'assessment', 'formal assessment' and 'informal assessment' were included at the beginning of the questionnaire. To further ensure that the full range of assessment strategies were captured in the data, the relevant section included a substantial list of possible assessment methods. Respondents were asked to indicate which of these they practised, and to describe any additional assessment methods they employed.

The respondents were identified through the six Queensland Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Regional Networks throughout Queensland. These networks were set up as part of Queensland's response to the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy to coordinate and enhance the varied efforts in adult language and literacy. The networks include representatives from stakeholder groups, including providers in TAFE, SkillShare, private provided and community programs. The Regional Executive Officers that coordinate these networks were asked to nominate practitioners from all of these sectors, including full-time teachers, part-time teachers and volunteer tutors.

A total of 55 practitioners spread throughout Queensland were invited to respond to the questionnaire within a two-week time frame. A reminder letter was set out one week after the questionnaires. Thirty-seven responses were received, an encouraging response rate of 67%, which in itself suggests that the research is timely and touched on some sensitive points that are of current concern. One response was a collective response from a group of teachers, and could not be included in the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative date were compiled and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows. Frequencies were calculated, and Pearson Chi-Square tests were carried out on a range or cross-tabulations of response items. For the attitudinal responses, the five-point range of responses was recoded to a three-point (positive, unsure, negative) scale to enhance the Chi-Square tests. Given the small sample size, weak associations between variables that are not statistically significant but may indicate a trend have been included in the discussion where of interest. Some qualitative responses, for example descriptions of assessment training or inservice, were coded into categories for quantitative analysis. Other qualitative data were collated and examined for themes, and issues.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 RESPONDENT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

The vast majority (92%) of the respondents were 36 years or older, the largest cohort being between 36 and 45 years of age. Twenty-nine (91%) of the respondents were female, reflecting the common bias in the field.

Nineteen (53%) have been working in the adult literacy field for more than 5 years. Another 15 (42%) have between one and five years' experience. Thirty-two (89%) of the respondents had experience in other educational contexts: 21 in primary education; 13 in secondary; 4 in remedial/disability programs; 2 in ESL programs; and 15 in adult education, including vocational training, bridging education and tertiary settings. Many had experience in more than one sector apart from adult literacy.

Thirty-three (92%) of the respondents had teaching qualifications (certificate, degree or diploma). Of these 14 (39% of all respondents) had pursued or were currently studying specialist studies in literacy or language education, including post-graduate qualifications, or the accredited inservice courses, 'Adult Literacy Teaching' and 'Adult Numeracy Teaching'. Three (8%) of the respondents had volunteer tutor training, or workplace training qualifications.

Thus, in general, the literacy workforce sampled is mature, female, experienced and professionally qualified, with a significant number pursuing or in possession of specialist qualifications in the area. They also display a significant breadth of experience in a range of educational settings.

Twenty-one (58%) of the 36 respondents had had a moderate level of training specifically in adult literacy assessment. A moderate level was interpreted as including inservice programs, such as Adult Literacy Teaching (ALT), or Adult Numeracy Teaching (ANT), with elements devoted to assessment methodology. Nine (25%) had had a minimal level (just as part of their volunteer tutor training) or no training, and 6 (17%) had had a substantial level (a tertiary unit or post-graduate study devoted to adult literacy assessment). The bulk at the moderate level could reflect the recent concerted effort to inservice adult literacy providers throughout the TAFE sector in particular. To a lesser extent, other providers have also accessed the ALT and ANT courses when available.

When asked to detail any other training that has contributed to their general understanding of assessment, 14 (39%) could not think of any such training, while 16 (44%) felt that their initial teacher training, and professional development programs in previous educational contexts contributed to their understanding. Six (17%) nominated previous training in remedial/disability education or in teaching English as a second language.

The sample included 4 part-time teachers, 19 full-time teachers, 1 volunteer tutor, 7 tutor coordinators, and 5 literacy workers who fell outside these categories, with roles such as SkillShare training officer, prison education officer, program coordinator or manager. This does not reflect the widespread trend of increased use of casual part-time teachers to staff literacy programs. Given that the nominations came from the networks' membership, full-time staff are probably better represented in this consultative activity than part-time or volunteer staff. There is a chance that given the sample's bias towards full-time staff, factors such as qualifications, inservice training and participation in assessment moderation may be overstated. However, given that the part-time staff, their attitudes and assessment practices may well set the tone and direction for the programs under their management, and thus their responses could be adequately representative of wider practice.

As perhaps to be expected, the more highly qualified practitioners reported more training specifically in adult literacy assessment ($p < .01$). This also suggests that assessment is not a focus in lower levels of training, such as volunteer tutor training. Full-time workers displayed significantly higher levels (moderate to substantial) of training specifically in adult literacy assessment ($p < .05$). Those with substantial training in adult literacy assessment could also identify moderate to substantial levels of other relevant assessment training in their background that informs their current practice ($p < .05$).

Part-time teachers and tutor coordinators had minimal to moderate levels of specific adult literacy assessment training. This highlights one possible risk of the increasing casualisation of literacy employment, that is, that part-time employment and dubious career prospects will not be enough incentive to pursue further study and qualifications in the field. Four of the 7 tutor coordinators only had minimal levels of training. This proportion could be of concern when this mode of provision is required to participate in more formal reporting structures, for example the National Reporting System (NRS). As the coordinators are the major professional support to the volunteer workforce, this sector could require considerable development prior to the NRS implementation.

Twenty-three (64%) of the respondents worked in TAFE programs, 7 (19%) in SkillShare settings, three (8%) in community-based provision and one (3%) in a workplace program (though other respondents also worked sometimes in workplace programs). This spread over the various sectors of provision is uneven and makes it difficult to draw decisive conclusions about differential practices across sectors, but comparisons of the data obtained may be indicative of patterns.

In the sample, 17 (47%) described their communities as regional urban centres, 15 (42%) described their community as rural, and only two responses came from metropolitan communities. Another two respondents felt their communities fell outside these categories - one working in a prison program, the other servicing an industrial/rural mix. The sample therefore is skewed towards providers outside the metropolitan areas. This could raise the question of whether degree of access to professional development opportunities and decision-making processes could affect attitudes and practices. On the other hand, the sample has managed to extend beyond the frequently sampled metropolitan setting, to reflect the diverse faces of literacy provision.

Of the 36 respondents, 27 (75%) were operating within a curriculum which specified target learning outcomes. Of these, 22 (61% of the total sample) were required at the end of the program to supply a report on each student against these learning outcomes. This reflects a major shift from negotiated student-centred programs to accredited curricula, and accountability to funding agencies. The vast majority of TAFE programs reported the use of explicit curriculum (20 of the 23). SkillShare providers seem to be in a state of transition, three of the seven sampled using explicit literacy curriculum. Programs with explicit curricula displayed a higher level of specific assessment training ($p < .05$), suggesting that the introduction of accredited curriculum has driven the professional development program, and delivered training where it is needed. However, there were still four respondents working under explicit curriculum with only minimal levels of assessment training.

3.2 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

The following table outlines the number of respondents who indicated that they used the described assessment practices.

Table 1: Number of respondents employing specific assessment practices (N=36)

ASSESSMENT PRACTICE	FREQUENCY (%)
A. Initial diagnostic assessment for placement and/or program planning.	32 (89%)
B. Ongoing informal observation and consideration of my students' progress, strengths and weaknesses.	34 (94%)
C. Systematic recording of my observations about my students' progress on an ongoing basis.	20 (56%)
D. Regular tests of word recognition and phonic skills.	15 (42%)
E. Maintenance of a portfolio of samples of students' work to demonstrate progress.	27 (75%)
F. Encouragement of self-evaluation by the students throughout the program.	30 (83%)
F. Facilitation of self-evaluation by students of their overall progress on completion of a course.	22 (61%)
H. Regular tests on agreed list of number facts or words (for spelling or vocabulary).	13 (36%)
I. Formally administered assessment tasks such as tests that reflect the program objectives, as checkpoints through the course (formative assessment).	24 (67%)
J. Formal assessment at the end of the course to assess overall student progress against stated outcomes, to facilitate future placement or	

to fulfil any reporting requirements (summative assessment).	13 (36%)
K. Participation in moderation of students' performance on assessment tasks with other literacy or numeracy teachers.	20 (56%)
L. Matching of students' performance on assessment tasks to some supplied descriptions or profiles of competency levels (e.g. ALAN Scales, or the Interim Literacy Course Matrix/ILCM).	20 (50%)
M. Contribution to other staff's assessment of my students' progress.	18 (50%)
N. Other.	6 (17%)

Examples of 'Other' practices included:

- informal, formative moderation;
- remote assessment by School of Distance Education;
- liaison with volunteer tutors re student progress;
- self assessment prior to the course;
- regular discussions with course teachers to evaluate students' progress.

Most of these are compatible with Items K or M and could have been subsumed under them.

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from these data is that adult literacy practitioners are in fact busy assessing, and employ a wide range of strategies, averaging a combination of more than eight methods each for assessing their students' progress.

The less popular methods, Items in D and H, are precisely the 'older style, decontextualised skills tests' that Falk (1995) criticised the field for over-utilising. This study then suggests a shift away from these practices. Without entering the debate of their relevance or pedagogical worth, it is significant that any respondent who utilised such methods also nominated a range of other methods of assessment.

An overwhelming majority (94%) indicated that they used ongoing informal observation as part of their assessment strategy. Falk's suggestion (1995: xvi) that there was 'a lack of explicit awareness of the role and nature of informal during course assessment ...' is not supported by these data. Rather, informal strategies were found to be ranked as the most commonly employed strategy, more common than the other highly ranked item - initial diagnostic assessment. The only two respondents who did not report this practice were tutor coordinators who presumably were one step removed from the learning context. This shows that traditional assessment practices have not been replaced or superseded, but rather supplemented with additional strategies.

Self-evaluation as formative and summative assessment strategies (Items F and G) were also popular strategies employed by 83% and 61% respectively. The decreased number for summative self-assessment could possibly be explained by the funding bodies' rejection of these as valid assessment tools for their purposes. Formative self-evaluation was particularly popular with full-time teachers (18 of the 19). Eighteen of the 27 programs that operate under explicit curriculum reported the use of summative self-evaluation strategies. These figures contrast with Falk's findings that reported a 'prevalence of 'top-down' practices' (1995: xvi).

These disparities between the two surveys could be the result of different samples, different survey instruments, or a change in practice over the intervening years. In support of elements of Falk's findings, the vast majority of practitioners surveyed have indicated that they undertake initial diagnostic testing (Item A). Similarly, in accordance with Falk's findings, formal summative assessment (Item J) is carried out by just over a third (36%) of the respondents. However, formal formative assessment (Item I) is carried out by 67% of the respondents. Formal formative assessment was overwhelmingly used in programs with an explicit curriculum ($p < .01$) and reporting requirements ($p < .01$). This suggests that change to more formal assessment practices is being driven by top-down agendas such as the introduction of accredited curriculum. In addition, formal formative assessment was only reported by respondents with teacher training or specialist qualifications.

Formal summative assessment (item J) was not reported in any programs which don't have an explicit curriculum, and in fewer than 50% of the programs that do. Even amongst those programs with reporting requirements, the majority (13 of 22) did not use formal summative assessment. Fifteen of the 23 TAFE programs samples did not use formal summative assessment.

There are two possible explanations for the drop off in formal assessment at the summative stage. Firstly, Cope et al. (1995: 18) describe what they term 'ongoing summative' assessment practices in competency-based courses, whereby various learning outcomes are assessed along the way, to create a composite summative assessment by the end of the course. In this light, the high response in Item I could indicate this sort of practice. Secondly, the current Queensland TAFE system has, to this point, retained the option for adult literacy students to choose not to participate in final evaluations. Whether this choice is mediated by teacher attitudes and advice, or whether it is genuine and independent reluctance on the part of the learners, the drop-off in formal summative assessments may be partially accounted for in this way.

To return to the distinction of 'formal' and 'informal' methods as defined previously, Items C (recorded observations), D (word/phonic tests), E (portfolios), M (number/spelling tests), I (formal formative), J (formal summative), and L (profile mapping) assessments could all constitute formal assessment in that they are conscious, planned, systematic and documented. Other practices such as self-evaluations (Items F and G), moderation (Item K) and diagnostic assessments (Item A) could also be carried out in a formal or informal way. The incidence of such formalised practices suggests that the field has largely come to terms with more formal, visible assessment processes.

Twenty respondents (56%) indicated that they participate in moderation processes (Item K). This is a slender majority, and it is disappointing that not more practitioners can benefit from this valuable networking and collegial process. Sixty-seven of the sampled programs with explicit curriculum (18 of 27) reported participation in moderation processes. To cater for more low key informal moderation strategies, Item M, 'contributing to other staff/s assessment of my student's progress', was included. Of the 18 respondents (50%) who reported this strategy, 16 were working within explicit curriculum. Interestingly, the one volunteer tutor and 5 of the 6 tutor coordinators did not report this strategy.

Twenty (56%) respondents employ profiling instruments (Item L). Nineteen of these respondents are working with explicit curricula. Usage of profiles was only reported by practitioners with teacher training or higher qualifications, though not by all of these groups. A significant majority of programs with reporting requirements (16 of 22) used profile instrument ($p < .05$). There was limited use of profile instruments in other program types. This indicates a growing, if not complete, acceptance of such instruments. The non-usage of profile instruments in other sectors of provision suggest that the blanket introduction of the NRS will require extra input.

When examining which sub-groups favour which assessment practices, the data suggest that many strategies are frequently distributed surprisingly evenly over various respondent categories. For example, Item C, systematic recordings of teacher observations had no correlation with whether the program utilised an explicit curriculum, or required reporting on completion, or with the work status of the respondent. Similarly, the use of phonic or word recognition tests (Item D), the maintenance of portfolios (Item E), and the use of spelling tests (Item H) showed no significant correlation with program type, training or qualifications of the respondent. These practices were not noticeably the domain of any sub-group.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to describe assessment practices that they would like to use in the future. The following table summarises their responses.

Table 2: Assessment practices respondents would like to develop by frequency (N=36)

	DESCRIPTION OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICE	FREQUENCY
A.	Peer assessment	1
B.	Systematic recording of observations	3
C.	Student self-assessment	3
D.	Development of assessment item bank to support a curriculum or program	3
E.	Identification of student goals	1
F.	Better initial diagnostic assessment practices	5
G.	Use of profile instruments	4
H.	Moderation	3
I.	Formal summative	1
J.	Involving and educating other parties (e.g. CES, industry program managers) in assessment	2

This broad spread shows a degree of curiosity in exploring, improving and extending assessment repertoires amongst the respondents. It should also be noted that there were three other responses in the nature of 'no more please!'

When asked to nominate the additional resources, training etc. they would need to implement these desired practices, the responses included:

- professional development opportunities (12 responses);
- better and more resource materials, such as assessment kits, item banks, and checklists (7 responses);
- more time (2 responses);
- support staff;
- liaison with other providers;
- qualified staff;
- moderation meetings;
- access to information about developments.

To confirm whether or not changes in policy have in fact filtered down to affect classroom practice, respondents were asked to describe what changes they have witnessed in assessment through their years of experience.

Ten of the 37 responses received singled out the increased accountability requirements to funding bodies, often suggesting that these expectations are met at the expense of assessment for the purpose of student feedback:

> Accountable to more sources, e.g. CES, industry, management (provider), let alone clients!
>
> Assessment is a requirement of systemic/funding factors not for any learning/adult education factors.
>
> A move towards quantification of performance - more for admin reasons than student benefits. Far more paper work required of teachers - however I see no benefit to the students - in fact the opposite in that I believe students tend to miss out on broader lit/num in favour of the set outcomes.

Nine responses mentioned the increased usage of formal assessment practices, and the new primacy given to assessment:

> More expectation towards formal assessment as curriculum and QA (Quality Assurance) comes on line.
>
> Implementation of CNL03 - Certificate in Vocational Access, has formalised and structured assessment procedures.
>
> While it was once believed that formal assessment was the BIG no-no, current practice places assessment also too much at the forefront.

The move to a competency-based curriculum and its assessment demands were nominated by 5 respondents as a major change in practice:

> ... the introduction of CBT has made a huge impact on assessment procedures. I think it is a good thing to clarify what exactly one is assessing, but I also think that CBT assessment can be quite reductionist.
>
> Switch to competency-based assessment in TAFE colleges, more accountability, more systematic reporting of progress, more structured courses.

with positive developments:

> More rigour while maintaining the 'supportive' perspective. Competency/ outcomes provide goals to reach rather than barriers to overcome.

Six other responses felt the move to more formal methods and structured curriculum had gone too far:

> Has become too structured and does not meet individual learners' goals.
>
> Pre-determined outcomes and assessment requirements offer little flexibility for special needs (of which the adult learners have a great abundance).

Seven other respondents felt that the new focus on assessment was out of proportion:

> From nothing to the ridiculous!
>
> Too much!

with unrealistic administrative demands placed on the teacher:

> Assessment has become a time-consuming function of the literacy teacher who now has to keep an inordinate number of records and who cannot for quality purposes fail to keep these records.

There was another group of responses that mentioned the role professional development should have played in supporting the changes.

> Although I am aware of the move towards the formalisation of assessment procedures I feel that any implementation should be preceded by training and clear guidelines ...
>
> Curriculum needs in the area of requirement and expectation have been established by National training bodies, but the expertise of the average teacher to carry them out has not been developed by the necessary training.

One respondent sums up the respondents' view of changes they have witnessed in assessment practices:

> Increased formality/ training/ accountability/ administration/ ongoing changes and expectations re staff expectations, needs, competence and study.

3.3 ATTITUDES REGARDING ASSESSMENT IN ADULT LITERACY PROVISION

To gauge practitioners' attitudes to assessment issues, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements. The statements were not designed to reflect any one stance on assessment methodology, but rather to test the water on different issues, such as informal versus formal practices, the adequacy of professional training, standardisation of assessment practices, and how students react to different assessment regimes. Table 3 (0verleaf) outlines the range of frequencies of responses to these statements.

Table 3: Attitudes towards assessment issues: Frequency of response and percentage of total respondents by trigger statement (N=36)

Attitudinal Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Formal assessment forms an important and conscious part of my teaching strategy.	9(25%)	10(28%)	6(17%)	8(22%)	3(8%)
b. Informal assessment forms an important part of my teaching strategy.			2 (6%)	12 (33%)	22 (61%)
c. I feel my training has equipped me well to undertake the program's required assessment duties.	3(8%)	6 (17%)	11 (31%)	9 (25%)	6 (17%)
d. Adult literacy students benefit from the clear indication of their levels and progress that formal assessment can give them.	11 (31%)	9 (25%)	10 (28%)	3 (8%)	2 (6%)
e. Most adult literacy students are intimidated and discouraged by formal, structured assessment tasks, such as tests.		6 (17%)	4 (11%)	8 (22%)	18 (50%)
f. Most adult literacy students are not daunted or discouraged by informal assessment procedures, e.g. interviews and classroom observations.	1 (3%)	4 (11%)	2 (6%)	12 (33%)	17 (47%)
g. It is important to develop an assessment strategy at the same time as developing program objectives.	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	6 (17%)	10 (28%)	18 (50%)
h. Any adult literacy curriculum should supply standard assessment tasks with marking guides so all students are assessed in the same way.	12 (33%)	7 (19%)	6 (17%)	4 (11%)	5 (14%)

Note: Some rows do not total 100% because of the occasional missing response.

Statement A displays a wide spread of opinion, with only 30% indicating that they value formal assessment strategies. Over 50% disagreed that formal assessment is an important part of their pedagogy. There was no relationship between how the respondent felt and whether the respondent worked with an explicit curriculum, or the type of provider (TAFE/SkillShare/community). However, there was a significant association with the amount of specific training the respondent had had ($p < .05$) in adult literacy assessment. Those with minimal training in assessment were uniformly negative, those with moderate to substantial levels of training were spread across the range. There was also a weak trend suggesting that the more highly qualified practitioners were more comfortable and positive about the role of formal assessment.

In stark contrast, 94% of respondents value informal assessment strategies (Statement B), supporting the traditional preference for non-intrusive assessment methodology in the field. The two respondents who did not respond positively indicated that they were unsure, as opposed to a negative response.

Of those who agreed with Statement A ('formal assessment is important'), additional comments suggest that some feel forced into this position:

> Don't like it this way, BUT we are forced into more formal assessment.

Others believe that formal assessment experience equips students for further study settings. Of those who are unsure or negative about formal assessment, their opinion seems to be based on the belief that formal assessment demands a compromise with programming based on student needs:

> It is something which can take too much of the focus away from what a student wants and needs.

There is another group who felt that circumstances, that is, the students involved and their level of competency, should be the deciding factor:

> I find formal assessment threatening and reminiscent of usually painful school experiences for the students. Some formal testing is gradually introduced corresponding to confidence growth.

Comments in support of informal methods show how integral they are to adult literacy provision, informing constant feedback to the student and the program:

> Students are constantly made aware of any improvements.

> After each lesson, I plan future lessons using weaknesses noticed.

> This is an ongoing process informing what happens in sessions.

Comments in favour of informal methods also imply a concern with the efficacy of other assessment modes:

> Observations, conversation will often give a much better indication of a student's depth of understanding.

> Less pressure on students can give a more accurate reflection of skills.

Statement C invited an opinion on how well equipped practitioners feel to undertake their assessment duties. There is a considerable spread of opinion, the bulk being unsure either way, with a slight skew towards the positive end. This suggests a degree of uncertainty and lack of confidence amongst a significant number of adult literacy teachers when it comes to assessment, and should alert the field to the need for substantial professional development to support any blanket introduction of the National Reporting System. There was a highly significant association between the level of specific training in adult literacy assessment ($p < .01$) and the attitudes expressed here. The higher the level of such training, the more positive the response. Higher levels of assessment training displayed a stronger association than did higher levels of qualification. Full-time practitioners were more positive than others ($p < .05$), but they, as a group, displayed higher levels of specific assessment training. Eleven of the 26 respondents operating under explicit curricula displayed uncertainty, while 6 of the 9 working in negotiated programs felt positive about their level of training.

Additional comments given highlight that experience is perhaps more important than training opportunities:

> I believe my experience teaching in a number of different programs and institutions with vastly different program objectives has helped me to formulate assessment procedures and practices appropriate to each situation. The recent training I completed reinforced much of my current thinking in this area.

This perhaps reflects the sample's breadth of other teaching experience. Other comments give the sense that teachers are constantly chasing the changing agenda, without any sense of arrival:

> Not really (feeling well equipped) in that during my time as an adult literacy teacher admin requirements re assessment procedures have/are continually changing.

Given that the majority of respondents had worked in adult literacy for a number of years, this is probably a common feeling.

In response to Statement D, 57% indicated that they were not convinced that formal assessment carried significant benefits for their students. Another 29% were unsure, with only 14% confident that there were benefits in formal assessment for the students. This resistance to formal methods was widespread through the sample, with no significant associations with other respondent characteristics.

Some respondents clarified their ambivalence:

> Yes, if they are making progress. No, if their progress is in smaller or slower steps than the assessment items can register.
>
> This is true of some students. Many, however, find formal assessment stressful and often do not demonstrate a true level of their ability because they do not perform well under pressure.
>
> It depends entirely on their level of literacy.

Others were more cynical:

> No, the teachers benefit more!

Statement E is the flip side of Statement D. There is a stronger indication here that the respondents believe that the risk of formal assessment is the potentially damaging impact on the students, 72% (50% strongly) agreeing that most students would be intimidated and discouraged. This feeling was spread throughout the sample, with no significant association with other factors. Additional comments, however, revealed another group of students who are not averse to formal assessment, thus warning against broad assumptions:

> ... Many students expect/desire formal assessment tasks, others don't.
>
> Especially low-level students. Some students like tests and relish their improvements.
>
> ... my experience is most enjoy these indicators of success and progress.
>
> I am not convinced that most are because every individual wants to know where they are in the learning phase and that someone has the expertise to help them.
>
> Depends on the group. Most community students don't want assessment. Workplace students want assessment for extrinsic, e.g. financial, reasons.

As an adjunct to Statement E, Statement F presents informal assessment as a less stressful mode. Again, a strong endorsement of informal methods is displayed - 80% agreeing that most adult literacy students are not intimidated by informal assessment. One comment showed some practical misgivings:

> This (informal assessment) is best assessment practice but hard to record and report.

Other comments showed that informal assessment is one strategy amongst others:

> This is where a variety of assessment methods is a must. One, so you can ensure no student is intimidated and two, to ensure that the facilitator can assist all students when it comes to coping with different assessment strategies.
>
> ... the implication is that we are comparing two methods here, formal and informal - (they) can be used successfully in concert.

There is still the question as to how valid the teachers' impressions of student reactions are, though these impressions would presumably be based on experience. However, the defence on behalf of the students' perceived reception of formal assessment is the commonly expressed rationale behind practitioner reluctance to employ formal methods. This seems to be the crux of the arguments against formal assessment methods, and warrants further research to ascertain the nature of student reactions, from the students' point of view.

Statement G shows that, for a majority (78%) of the respondents, assessment is not an afterthought, but rather considered to be an integral part of adult literacy program planning:

> Even informal or self-assessment techniques need to be thought about, planned etc.
>
> Otherwise we have no goals.

There was a weak association suggesting that the more specific training the respondent had had in adult literacy assessment, the more positive their attitude towards assessment as an ongoing program feature. There was no association with the degree of practitioner's adult literacy experience. Additional comments illustrate that planning is often balanced with flexible adaptation as the program progresses:

> ... Sometimes it is necessary to change assessment strategies mid-stream to ensure all students are catered for.
>
> May need to be modified, but a forward plan is important.

Statement H suggests that assessment processes should be standardised. A slim majority (52%) disagreed with this idea, many disagreeing strongly. There was no significant relationship between this attitude and other respondent characteristics, though a weaker trend suggesting that full-time workers were more negative than others. Comments in opposition of standardised assessment tools pointed out the contextual nature of literacy practices:

> If we believe that literacy is a highly contextual, variable social practice, how can we adopt this stance?

and the need to cater for a variety of learning (and appropriate assessment) styles amongst the student group:

> Guides are helpful but each student has their own set of unique problems and assessment tools can become too rigid to ascertain what a person learns.

The comments revealed a strong sense of different practices suiting different levels of student competency:

> Okay for level 3 and above ... Not for Level 1 and 2 - very individual.

Those agreeing with standardised assessment instruments saw their value more as item banks to be adapted for local usage:

> Curriculum should provide models of assessment tasks which can be contextualised for students at different sites.
>
> I don't think everyone should be assessed the same way, but standard assessment tasks with marking guides would be a useful resource for teachers.

For some practitioners, standardised assessment would obviously take some of the angst out of fulfilling their assessment duties:

> At least we could say everyone has to do them!

Respondents were finally asked to provide a general statement outlining their personal attitude to assessment practices in adult literacy provision. Of the 32 responses received, seven statements were strongly opposed to the new focus on formal assessment methods, for example:

> It sucks. I do believe that adult literacy practitioners do need to develop more defined concepts of sound theory and best practice BUT dancing to the tune of systems which require us to place our students in anti-learning environments will not facilitate this process. Assessment in adult literacy programs should only be self-assessment by the students. Program effectiveness needs to be evaluated on how well we facilitated the students' achieving their own needs and goals.

In 11 statements, the disadvantages of formal assessment practices were described. These included:

- the stress placed on students;

> ... formalised assessment scares the living daylights out of my students.

- the lack of flexibility in formal assessment regimes to accommodate individual needs;

> When dealing with adult literacy students, their level of competencies vary so widely, it becomes extremely difficult to create ONE assessment task which will meet the needs of all participants.

> Formal assessment and reporting requirements tend to have us push students into "boxes" - with all having to do the same ... formal assessment.

- the purpose to which such assessments are put;

> The difficulty with formal assessment is always going to be the interpretation of the assessment by the agency or organisation receiving it, for their purposes and needs.

> At a recent meeting our institute director stated the likelihood that we would be funded in the future on module outcomes. Obviously this would be a joke in the adult literacy area. This does however appear to be an option and direction that assessment and accountability seem to be heading.

- and the negative reception of assessment requirements by volunteer tutors involved in pro vision;

> The requirements of structured courses, formal assessment and reporting has caused a great deal of concern from the volunteer tutors ... The tutors are our greatest resource and if we try to bring in formal structured courses for them to follow we will lose a large number of them.

> Volunteer tutors (without whom I could not function) complain that it is not so much 'fun' any more. The formality of the course and required assessments is sometimes stifling.

Six statements tied the issue of assessment as an adjunct to their view of overly-prescriptive CBT curricula, that restrict the practitioner's flexibility to respond to individual student needs;

> My fear is that these requirements will become a rigid set of rules, that that will force what is to be learned, and how it is to be learned, on every adult learner... I would not like to see some rigid set of rules that will destroy a learner 's right to achieve in their own choice of learning knowledge and their learning style and rate of learning.
>
> ... a pre-determined outcome and assessment process is too inflexible and inappropriate to the learner's needs.

and to respond to special target group needs;

> The curriculum is not always appropriate. Aboriginal students require adaptable, flexible programs with a cultural emphasis. Students with intellectual disabilities cannot be assessed in a standardised and formal way. They often require special programs.

For three respondents, assessment against the curriculum's explicit learning outcomes has become an end in itself:

> I see assessment driving some programs. My belief is that it is given too much emphasis as it is informal assessment which has the most potential to improve teaching and learning.

More specifically, some respondents described philosophical problems with the assessment/reporting tools such as profile instruments, that they were required to use:

> I teach something, assess it, and the student is marked 'J' = 'competent'. Yet, sometimes I know full well that if I were to repeat the assessment next week, the result might be very different. People with learning problems don't fit the mould like most people. Even though they are making steady progress, they are not always consistent or predictable. Depending on the day, the mood and other variables, formal assessment can be either unfair or falsely generous.
>
> I have concerns with judgements, how misleading a judgement may be and how impossibly reductionist and absolute numerical scores can be - e.g. ILCM levels.

The quotes above illustrate the nature of practitioners' resistance to formalising assessment strategies in adult literacy. However, seven statements recognised the advantages of the shift in practice:

> Formal assessment is necessary and desirable. Students need to be able to measure their progress and claim awards. It also leads to more rigorous planning and more structured classes. It facilitates moderation and promotes standards.
>
> ... assessment is necessary to prove achievement of objectives. It gives the course credibility.

and the fact that some students will derive satisfaction and motivation from participating in formal assessments:

> Some students are motivated more. Formal assessment practice prepares students for further study and education and very often educates in discipline necessary for entry to a workplace.
>
> Formal assessment gives our clients a goal to work towards... .

The strongest statement in favour of embracing the wider agendas of competency-based accredited provision and more rigorous assessment regimes, highlighted the gains made by the field through its participation in wider agendas:

> It is time for 'literacy' to come in from the backblocks, to be recognised as providing the building blocks of training, education and social practice, rather than an appendage to mainstream courses. Adherence to the 'warm and fuzzy' image will eventually lose the field the gains it has made in recent years. The 'language, literacy and numeracy' field of training and education must demonstrate to industry, schools etc. that a rigorous programs of lang/lit/num provides a solid foundation from which to develop or with which to develop 'mainstream' courses and industry training.

The majority of other statements that recognised advantages and disadvantages in more formal assessment practices, expressed comfort with a compromise situation whereby systemic assessment requirements reflected the level of the students involved. Informal assessment was considered appropriate for lower level students, and more formal practices appropriate for higher levels, with options for students to elect to participate or not in the assessment tasks. A total of 11 responses suggested they would be comfortable with such a tiered system. The following quote is one example of the reasoning given:

> There is a need for assessment in adult literacy but I think formal assessment is only necessary at levels 3 and 4 (of CNLO3), when the student knows that a satisfactory standard is necessary in order to receive the Certificate in Vocational Access. At the lower levels when the student is struggling and probably will always do so, formal assessment is another barrier to their beginning to feel some sense of achievement and stops them from continuing their learning. Many of these students are progressing sideways rather than longitudinally and there is no formal assessment for this, although both student and teacher know when progress is being made. It is only when levels 1 & 2 are assessed formally that they lose heart and begin to discount progress in other areas.

Elsewhere, respondents articulated other qualities of what they considered desirable models of assessment. A number of these comments demonstrate continued adherence to the traditional individualised, social welfare philosophy of adult literacy:

> Assessment should be student-centred, in context and relevant to the student's needs.
>
> I prefer to fit the learning outcomes to meet individual student goals and use informal assessment to measure competence.
>
> The assessment of a student wanting to do, or having done, a literacy course should be largely about confidence, attitude, self-esteem, independence etc and little about levels and grades.

Others argue that qualitative and self-assessments should be acceptable modes of assessment-cum-reporting:

> I think the students' observations of how well they are doing should be sought as well as the teacher's ongoing record of progress.
>
> The most important aspect of assessment is to give the student realistic feedback on their progress. Therefore assessment must reflect their goals and aspirations and be tied to the course work they have been doing. ... We must go beyond "X is making good progress" and be able to articulate what it is that X has achieved.
>
> As teachers we need to develop assessment practices that lie somewhere between (CBT) and rubber band assessments.

This spread of attitudes suggests that, as a professional body, adult literacy practitioners are in the process of being converted to an acceptance of more formal assessment practices. However, a major foundering point in their transition seems to be the compromise of flexibility to tailor provision and assessment to a client group, in favour of explicit, prescriptive curriculum that drives the assessment process. This flexibility was the traditional strength of adult literacy provision, and the field, it seems, would rather explore ways and means of accommodating such flexibility within the emerging agendas, than sacrifice it entirely.

4. DISCUSSION

External agendas such as the introduction of competency-based training, accredited curricula and external accountability requirements have changed the face of literacy provision, and its assessment practices in particular. The changes from student-centred programs informed by invisible, non-intrusive informal assessment practices, to curriculum-driven programs incorporating "high-stake" assessment by visible, formal methods to report to third parties, have been imposed from above. As a result, the field has had to adopt practices it previously eschewed or dismissed as irrelevant to the field, creating potential tension for the practitioner between the "confronting discourses" of inherent attitudes and imposed practices. The transition period has seen a growing employment of profile reporting instruments, increased use of formal assessment practices, and various efforts to provide professional development to practitioners involved in the transition. This study attempted to survey assessment practices across literacy sectors and to document the underlying attitudes that support or conflict with these practices.

The practitioners sampled were in general mature, qualified teachers with a breadth of educational experience. The level of specific training in adult literacy assessment emerged as the most influential factor in distinguishing patterns in assessment practices and attitudes. The bulk of respondents had only had minimal to moderate levels of training in assessment. Those with higher specialist qualifications had more specific assessment training to draw on, and this showed in their higher levels of confidence to undertake their assessment duties. Tutor scheme coordinators and tutors had typically low levels of training in assessment, which suggests that this sector will need additional developmental work before they can participate confidently in wider assessment /reporting requirements. Respondents who had a moderate level of assessment training were not convinced that their training equipped them for their assessment duties as delineated in explicit curricula.

A new constellation of program characteristics has emerged in response to the external agendas, in particular in the TAFE sector, constituting a new culture of literacy provision. These include the use of explicit, accredited CBT curricula, reporting requirements using profile instruments, specialist qualifications and professional development opportunities. These characteristics present as an interdependent package of reforms. Increasingly formal assessment practices that are subject to scrutiny seem to be part of the package that the practitioners cannot avoid. This begs the question whether the field would have chosen the path of more formalised assessment, without the wider systemic changes. As this culture develops, the gap between this accredited sector and others will grow, making it difficult to introduce blanket strategies, such as the NRS. Not all providers will be at the same starting line.

This study has shown that literacy practitioners are employing a wide range of assessment strategies, both formal and informal, and consider assessment an important part of overall program planning. Each practitioner has a repertoire of strategies, not just relying on one or two. The traditional preference for informal, incidental assessment has not been discarded, but rather practitioners are accruing more strategies into their repertoire to complement this one. In addition they expressed interest in acquiring more, with the assistance of focussed professional development and support materials such as item banks. Most assessment practices were evenly spread across the sample sectors, apart from formal formative and summative practices. These latter strategies were utilised only in programs with explicit curricula, reporting requirements and qualified staff, underscoring the constellation of factors shaping a new culture of provision.

Though participating in more formal assessment strategies, the respondents still did not value these practices highly, putting much more emphasis on the importance of informal assessment in their programs. They were not on the whole convinced about the possible benefits of formal assessment to the students, but they were convinced that formal assessment carried risks for their students. Specific training in adult literacy assessment seems to encourage more positive attitudes to formal practices. However, there remains a strong core of attitudinal resistance to formal methodologies among literacy providers, at the crux of which is the concern over the impact of formal assessment on students' confidence, and the perceived loss of flexibility to tailor provision and assessment to individual needs. Though some respondents could identify students who willingly participated and gained from formal assessment practices, this protective, negative attitude persists. Further research is needed to substantiate or challenge this common perception of student attitudes.

There is another cohort of respondents who in general could acknowledge advantages in the direction assessment practices were taking, but had some misgivings at this point. These concerns included their own lack of training to inform their new practice; reservations about some of the assessment tools or processes they were required to use; and the constant tension between meeting student needs in a prescriptive curriculum. For this group, a frequently expressed compromise would be tiered or phased assessment strategies, whereby low level students were assessed informally, and more formal practices introduced as the student's competency increased. There was some interest expressed in standardised assessment tasks for any curricula, but comments showed this to be largely an interest in the provision of support materials, models of good practice, and item banks to be adapted to local settings, rather than for tightly controlled assessment instruments.

At the other end of the scale, the sample included some strong advocates for the move to more visible, rigorous assessment practices, frustrated by the field's continued adherence to "warm, fuzzy", "rubber band" practices. These practitioners had made the transition between paradigms and were willing participants in the wider agendas at play.

In summary, adult literacy is a field in a state of transition, with sectors and individuals at various stages of transition towards the emerging culture of accredited provision. The imposition of directions from above or from outside the field has produced tensions between attitudes and required practices, but this study suggests that attitudes are gradually shifting in the wake of changing practices. If provider organisations are prepared to listen to practitioner's suggestions on how to adapt or support assessment practices, the result could accommodate strengths from interests both internal and external to the field.

Catherine Doherty
Department of Training and Industrial Relations

Francis Mangubhai
University of Southern Queensland

Joan Shearer
University of Southern Queensland
in conjunction with
the Language and Literacy Section
of Toowoomba College of TAFE

References

Cope, B., Solomon, N., Kapitzke, C., Plymer, D., McNamara, T., Brown, A., Scheeres, H., Slade, D., Hill, K. & Pritchard, R. 1994
Assessment and Moderation Process in Adult Literacy and Adult ESL in Tendered Labour Market Programs, Australian Language and Literacy Policy 1994 Project #3, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Dymock, D. R. 1994
"An issue of significant community concern": The post-war development of adult literacy policy and provision in Australia, in N.S.W. Adult Literacy Research Network NLLIA/UTS Centre for Language and Literacy, *Towards a History of Adult Literacy in Australia: A Record of the History of Adult Literacy Weekend, Nov., 1994.*

Falk, I. 1995
Comparison and Evaluation of Adult Literacy Assessment Practices, Australian Language and Literacy Policy National Project, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Sanguinetti, J. 1994
Negotiating Competence: The Impact on Teaching Practice of CGEA, NLLIA, Victoria.

Appendix I:1
The Questionnaire

15 March 1996

Dear

What do you think about assessment in adult literacy and numeracy programs?

I would like to invite you to respond to the enclosed survey about your current assessment practices and attitudes to assessment in adult literacy and numeracy programs.

This survey is an action research project funded by the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA). It arose through a concern that with developments such as the National Reporting System to be implemented in 1997, all literacy providers have to increasingly participate in structured assessment and reporting processes. This is in response to an increased demand for accountability to funding bodies on tangible "outcomes" of literacy programs. This shift marks a shift from the earlier philosophy of adult literacy provision that tended to avoid formal assessment in the interests of building students' confidence. This survey is an attempt to gauge how practitioners feel about such developments, and how confident they are in carrying out their evolving assessment duties.

I know you are probably busy, but your response would be very valuable. Hopefully the results of the project will inform future policy and professional development strategies in the area of assessment practices.

Your identity will remain confidential, and at no stage will your responses be used in such a way that could identify you or your employer. If you have any concerns or queries, please contact Cathie Doherty, on (076) 38 3346.

Please return the completed survey form in the envelope provided, by Friday 29 March. Your contribution will be most appreciated.

Yours sincerely

CATHIE DOHERTY
PROJECT OFFICER

Appendix I:2

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA
QUEENSLAND ADULT LITERACY RESEARCH NETWORK NODE

THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT AS AN ONGOING FEATURE OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

CONFIDENTIAL

ANY QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?
PLEASE CONTACT CATHIE DOHERTY ON (076) 38 3346

PLEASE RETURN IN THE SUPPLIED ENVELOPE TO:

DOROTHY LLOYD
TOOWOOMBA COLLEGE OF TAFE
P0 BOX 80
TOOWOOMBA 4350

BY FRIDAY 29 MARCH.

Appendix I:3

SOME DEFINITIONS:

For the purposes of this study, please consider the following terms to mean:

Assessment:

Any process or procedure whereby judgements are formed of a student's degree of competence, strengths or weaknesses, or of his/her progress towards the objectives of a learning program. This includes formal and informal assessment techniques.

Formal assessment:

- assessment that is planned and undertaken consciously by the teacher; the outcomes of which are systematically recorded, to inform any reporting requirements;
- the same assessment is applied to all students in the program, under similar conditions;
- students are aware that they are being assessed.

This could include test/exam procedures, systematically collecting samples of work, or targeted and recorded observations of students' performance in learning tasks.

Informal assessment:

- ongoing cumulative judgements and feedback on student progress derived from incidental observation and participation in the learning activities of the program;
- outcomes may not be recorded, but add to the teacher's incremental mental picture of the student's performance;
- students may not be aware that judgements are being made;
- assessment judgements are made in contextualised interactions, which may differ between students.

Appendix I:4

Please supply the following information. At no stage will your responses be used in such a way that could identify you or your program. Where there is insufficient space, please attach an additional sheet.

SECTION 1 - ABOUT YOU

1. I consider my community to be:
   ( ) Predominantly metropolitan
   ( ) Predominantly regional urban
   ( ) Predominantly rural
   ( ) Other, i.e. ____________________

2. I am:
   ( ) FEMALE
   ( ) MALE
   and ( ) 25 years old or less
   ( ) 26 - 35 years old
   ( ) 36 - 45 years old
   ( ) 46 years old or more

3. I currrently work in adult literacy as:
   ( ) a part-time teacher
   ( ) a full-time teacher
   ( ) a volunteer tutor
   ( ) a volunteer tutor coordinator
   ( ) other, i.e. ____________________

4. I work in:
   ( ) a TAFE program
   ( ) a Skillshare program
   ( ) a community program
   ( ) workplace programs
   ( ) other. Please specify: ____________________

5. a) Is your program based on a curriculum that states specific learning outcomes?
   ( ) No - Go to Question 6
   ( ) Yes.
   b) If Yes, Are you required to provide a report on each student at the end of the program against these learning outcomes?
   ( ) No
   ( ) Yes

6. I have worked in adult literacy for:
   ( ) 1 year or less
   ( ) between 1 to 5 years
   ( ) more than 5 years

7. I have other teaching experience as follows:

______________________________ Years: _____
______________________________ Years: _____
______________________________ Years: _____

Appendix I:5

8. I have the following educational qualifications:

PRIMARY:____________________
SECONDARY:__________________
TERTIARY:___________________
OTHER:

9. I have had the following training or professional development in the specific area of assessment for adult literacy or numeracy: *(e.g. a semester unit on assessment in my teaching qualification; a 2 hour session in my volunteer tutor training; as part of the Adult Literacy Teaching professional development program....)*

Description	Approximate hours of instruction	Year

10. Prior to your experience in the field of adult literacy or numeracy, what training in assessment have you had?

Description	Approximate hours of instruction	Year

Appendix I:6

SECTION 2: ABOUT YOUR ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

11. In my adult literacy program/s, I incorporate the following assessment practices:
(Tick any relevant response. Please provide additional information if your practices are not adequately described.)

( ) a. Initial diagnostic assessment for placement and/or program planning.

( ) b. Ongoing informal observation and consideration of my students' progress, strengths and weaknesses.

( ) c. Systematic recording of my observations about my students' progress on an ongoing basis.

( ) d. Regular tests of word recognition and phonic skills.

( ) e. Maintain a portfolio of samples of students' work to demonstrate their progress.

( ) f. Encourage self-evaluation by the students throughout the program.

( ) g. Facilitate self-evaluation by students of their overall progress on completion of a course.

( ) h. Regular tests on agreed list of number facts or words (for spelling or vocabulary).

( ) i. Formally administered assessment tasks such as tests that reflect the program objectives, as checkpoints through the course (formative assessment).

( ) j. Formal assessment tasks at the end of the course to assess overall student progress against stated outcomes, facilitate future placement or to fulfil any reporting requirements (summative assessment).

( ) k. Participate in moderation of students' performance on assessment tasks with other literacy or numeracy teachers.

( ) l. Match my students' performance on assessment tasks to some supplied descriptions or profiles of competency levels (e.g. ALAN scales, or the Interim Literacy Course Matrix/ILCM)

( ) m.I contribute to other staff's assessment of my students' progress.

( ) n. OTHER. Please provide a brief description:

____

____

____

Appendix I:5

12. What assessment practices or procedures would you like to incorporate in the future? *(Nominate items from Question 11 above, or describe briefly.)*

13. What additional training/expertise/resources/support would you consider necessary to implement these practices *(nominated in Q.12)* ?

14. During your experience working in adult literacy, what changes have you witnessed in the area of assessment requirements and expectations?

Appendix I:8

SECTION 3: ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDES TO ASSESSMENT IN ADULT LITERACY

NOTE: PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOUR COMMENTS WILL NOT AT ANY STAGE BE USED IN SUCH A WAY THAT COULD IDENTIFY YOU OR YOUR PROGRAM.

QUESTIONS 15 - 22: Consider the following statements and indicate on the scale to what extent you agree/disagree with each statement, IN GENERAL. Feel free to supply additional comments where desired.

15. Formal assessment forms an important and conscious part of my teaching strategy.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

16. Informal assessment forms an important part of my teaching strategy.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

17.I feel my training has equipped me well to undertake the program's required assessment duties.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

Appendix I:9

18. Adult literacy students benefit from the clear indication of their levels and progress that formal assessment can give them.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

19. Most adult literacy students are intimidated and discouraged by formal, structured assessment tasks, such as tests.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

20. Most adult literacy students are not daunted or discouraged by informal assessment processes, e.g. interviews and classroom observations.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

21. It is important to develop an assessment strategy at the same time as developing program objectives.

STRONGLY AGREE				STRONGLY DISAGREE
5	4	3	2	1

COMMENT:

FILLING IN THE BLANKS: CONSTRUCT VALIDITY ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT TASKS FOR ADULT LITERACY STUDENTS

Ann Kelly

Introduction

Wagner (1993) has suggested that when constructing knowledge in a disciplinary field, researchers work within either of the following two paradigms of ignorance. They fill in blank spots, that is, respond to questions already raised by other research colleagues and practitioners. Alternatively, they identify blind spots, that is, pose new questions for the field. The work reported in this chapter fits the first category, filling in the blanks with respect to the moderation of assessment processes in an adult literacy curriculum. In the discussion section, however, the wider question of the adoption of competency-based training in adult literacy is addressed.

In 1995 adult literacy teachers working within TAFE institutes in Queensland were required for the first time to provide programs that met competency-based training guidelines. The development and conduct of an assessment procedure are implicit in this requirement. Yet, systemically, very little formalised staff development is available to assist teachers with the resulting new assessment demands.

In the adult literacy field, two initiatives were taken in 1995 by the Queensland Research Network Node of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA) to improve this situation. During the first half of the year, Joy Cumming and Christa van Kraayenoord each presented a number of workshops focusing on assessment issues. The second initiative involved the offering of small grants to adult literacy teachers to enhance their assessment practices. Sharon Mullins, Ruth Kemp and I, teachers at the Southbank Institute of TAFE, received one of these grants.

In our submission to the NLLIA committee we proposed to invite practitioners in TAFE institutes to provide assessment items related to the Personal Focus strand of the Certificate of Vocational Access course. This strand is one of four in the certificate course, the others being Employment, Vocational and Workplace. The personal domain was chosen for two reasons: our own experience in teaching this particular focus and the contentious nature of the suitability of a competency-based framework within the personal domain of people's lives.

We also invited practitioners to provide examples of student responses to these assessment items. However, when it became obvious that very few examples of student work would be available, we decided to limit our collection to assessment items. The purpose of collecting these examples was to initiate a moderation process whereby these items would be validated by practitioners in the field.

In this chapter the literature that informed our work and the process that we adopted as a first step towards the establishment of a bank of assessment tasks, assessment criteria and instructions or rubrics for completing the tasks in the personal strand are detailed. It was anticipated that the resultant material could then be used as models for assessment practice in the adult literacy field in Queensland. In a subsequent section the action learning/action research process that was adopted in the project is described. Finally, some reflections on wider considerations of competency-based training are presented.

Adult literacy assessment and moderation conventions

Until the implementation in 1995 of the competency-based curriculum, the *Certificate of Vocational Access*, assessment in the adult literacy field in Queensland was not prescriptive in either content or process. At best, assessment practices reflected the principles enunciated by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy in 1992. These are reproduced in Figure 1. These principles had been published in a position paper in an attempt to provide guidelines for best practice in assessment and to ensure that performance scales were not used in adult literacy contexts (Griffin & Forwood, 1991). Generally, however, little formal assessment of adult literacy course delivery was performed in Queensland before 1995. This situation also prevailed across Australia until the early 1990s (Cope et al., 1994) and was consistent with student-centred, local, flexible approaches to provision that existed at the time.

PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment should be multi-dimensional, that is, tap attitudes, knowledge, processes and skills with multiple measures acknowledging the complex nature of literacy.
2. Assessment tools and reporting mechanisms should be developed in conjunction with and be informed by curriculum frameworks, specific contexts and articulation processes.
3. Assessment should be continuous and integral to the teaching/learning process (and the curriculum). The process should be costed separately, i.e. identified in funding submissions.
4. Assessment tools need to be based on consistent and appropriate theories which make explicit relationships between language and the socio-cultural context and use authentic and relevant texts and tasks.
5. Assessment procedures (tools, etc) should be regularly reviewed (validity, reliability, appropriate use).
6. Assessment should be a collaborative process carried out in an environment conducive to allowing students maximum opportunity to demonstrate ability. The rights, needs, sensibilities and integrity of the individual are the prime consideration.
7. The purpose of the assessment must be explicit and clear to all stakeholders: the student, the assessor and whoever commissions the assessment.

8. Reporting systems must be understandable and accessible and to some extent, standardised.
9. There should be different kinds of reporting mechanisms for different stakeholders.
10. The duration of the assessment report should be specified.
11. Assessors should have appropriate training.
12. The 'accreditation' or 'registration' of assessors should be supported.

(Australian Council for Adult Literacy, 1992)

Figure 1

A similar lack of formality prevailed for the use of moderation conventions. The definition of moderation coined by Lyons (1994:21) guided the project team. Lyons' suggested that

> moderation normally refers to the range of activities that are designed to ensure parity and fairness in assessment practice and decision - achieved by clarifying and developing common understandings of standards and learning goals and enhancing validity and reliability in assessment design and application.

Because moderation processes are linked closely to assessment practices, it is not surprising that there is no past evidence of national or systemic unanimity in conceptions of best practice in moderation within the adult literacy sector. In fact, there is virtually no mention of moderation in the adult literacy literature until this decade.

Assessment and moderation within a competency-based framework

Assessment issues are an integral part of the literature relating to the implementation of competency-based training in Australia. However, two approaches to the issue of assessment issues are discernible. One form has been through the development of procedural texts (Gonczi, Hagar & Anthanasou, 1993; Hagar, Anthanasou & Gonczi, 1994) to accompany the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Council's (VEETAC, 1993) competency standards framework. VEETAC has been positioned as the body charged with overseeing key competency-based policy developments in Australia. VEETAC's publications have been drawn upon in this chapter to contextualise the assessment principles that have been recommended for use within the vocational sector. The second form is a substantial corpus of critique. The authors contributing to this body of work include Biggs (1994), Burrows (1993), Hall (1995/6) and Wolf (1995). While these co-exist in the research community, there is virtually no promotion of substantive critique evident within vocational training institutions (Stevenson, 1992). Through this critical work, the sanctioned model guiding competency-based assessment will be examined and an alternative assessment model will be presented.

In this section the model of assessment developed by VEETAC (1993) is presented and the implications of this model for use by adult literacy teachers in the Queensland sector will also be discussed.

In 1993, assessment was defined by VEETAC (p.13) as:

> the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on the nature and extent of progress towards the performance requirements set out in a standard, a learning outcome and, at the appropriate point, making the judgement on whether competency has been achieved.

Four essential features of competency-based assessment were identified in this framework: validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness. However, VEETAC provided little attending elaboration about how these features might be addressed by teachers in developing assessment processes. To remedy this situation, Hagar, Anthanasou and Gonczi (1994) produced two documents, *Assessment: Technical Manual* and its companion, *Assessment: Practical Guide*. The validity aspects of the technical manual were used initially to provide a focus for our study. Validity is generally accepted to mean that assessment measures actually test or judge what they are intended to test or judge. The prime positioning of validity and the relegation of the other features of the framework to sub-set positions within the validity construct are consistent with Linn's (1994) view.

Linn asserts that considerations such as reliability and fairness are only important to the degree that they assist in ensuring that assessment measures are valid or indicate that action needs to be taken to improve the degree of validity of the measures.

The following principles frame the concept of validity within the VEETAC (1993) document.

- The assessment criteria must be sufficiently broad to encompass the range of skills and knowledge necessary to demonstrate specific competencies.
- The assessment methods and tasks must be capable of determining whether assessees possess the cognitive attributes that underpin these competencies or not.
- Sufficient evidence must be provided on a range of occasions and across diverse contexts to ensure that valid judgements can be made.
- Monitoring and review processes should be established to ensure that both task selection, assessment criteria and rubrics are interpreted in consistent ways.

They are discussed separately in the following section.

Breadth

The issue of breadth of coverage is critical in the assessment of competence. Yet it was not always considered in the development of the *Certificate of Vocational Access*. In the module LIT 113, Literacy and Language Personal Focus, Level 2, the learning outcome is "to use literacy and language texts related to participation, discussion and decision making within groups within the community". Two tasks are suggested as exemplars: read and act on minutes of meetings, and take personal notes. These tasks are fine. However, it is noticeable that the assessment criteria relate only to participation in a meeting. This specificity is too narrow. Assessment criteria should be sufficiently broad to apply to a range of tasks that would be appropriate for this learning outcome.

To be fair, this problem is not common in the Certificate of Vocational Access and is likely to be remedied in the draft to be available in 1996.

Underlying knowledge and skills

The second principle in the VEETAC framework focuses on the assessment of the understanding and skills inherent in the performance of tasks. This is not a simple matter. Soucek (1993:166) suggests that underlying knowledge and skills might be conceptualised as constituting three domains: "linguistic, interpersonal and cognitive". Even this construct may not be sufficiently elaborate. For example, Stevenson (1993a), drawing on the work of cognitive psychologists such as Brown, Scardimalia and Collins, differentiates between specific and higher order processing skills. Further, Soucek (1993) claims that, while the assessment of understanding and skills might provide an indication of performance, the reverse does not hold. For example, a person may be able to apply a particular algorithm to solve a mathematical problem but he or she may not understand whether that algorithm is an appropriate one.

In order to be in a position to assess the knowledge and skills related to specific competencies, two steps must be taken. Firstly, the specific knowledge underpinning the skill must be identified. This must then be translated into assessment criteria and task instructions. An example showing slippage between the assessment criteria and task demands can be found in the second learning outcome in LIT 111 Literacy and Language Personal Focus, Level 1 A of the Certificate of Vocational Access. It states that competency is achieved when an assessee can "read and record very short, explicit, context-embedded texts associated with membership of and interaction within a relevant group". A suggested task is for assessees to prepare a list of names (minimum 5) of significant members of a relevant group in order to complete a relevant task. The following assessment criteria are stipulated:

- write the names from memory
- write the names so that they can be understood
- explain the list orally and carry out a task using the list
- explain how the spelling of names will be checked before writing invitations, cards, etc.

In the exemplars from our own classes and those provided by colleagues that we examined, we found that different interpretations were evident. In one case, students were asked to "Write the names of four of your family members". There are constructs here that are being assessed without explication. In relation to the construct "name", what constitutes a name? Is a first name, first and family names, or any other possible combinations, required? Additionally, the intention of the assessor in relation to the construct of "family members" is not clear. In a multi-cultural society such as ours the word "family" can be interpreted variously.

A similar example provided by another assessor was more explicit. Student were required to: "Write a list of 5 people in our class. Beside their names, write a food item for them to bring to a class morning tea. Use their first names only." While the instructions could obviously be written more logically, this example meets the outcome criteria well. It was accompanied by a clear set of instructions and an assessment criteria proforma.

Sufficient evidence

The general assessment literature is replete with exhortations to use a range of tasks to improve the degree of validity (Linn, 1994; Messick, 1994; Shavelson, Baxter & Pine, 1992; International Reading Association/National Centre for the Teaching of English, 1994). Similarly, there is a recommendation to this effect within the adult field. Principle 6 of the report, *Assessment and Moderation Processes in Adult Literacy and Adult ESL inTendered Labour Market Programs* by Cope et al. (1994:85) states:

> Multiple assessment tasks, and where possible several assessors, are used to assist in the reliability of the assessment outcome.

This principle of usage of a range of tasks was critical in our project. We sought to moderate the range of assessment tasks, criteria and rubrics relating to the personal focus strand of the *Certificate of Vocational Access* so that a bank of tasks that are acceptable to the field are available in the future. At this stage in the development of moderation processes within the TAFE system comparability of tasks and reliability between raters and across contexts and situations were not being addressed.

Significant issues, hinging on interpretations of the constructs "sufficiency" and "evidence" in this principle, needed to be addressed in our project. "Sufficiency" could refer to the number of performances or the completeness of the assessment criteria to meet the outcome. There also needs to be a consideration of what breadth of evidence might constitute sufficiency. This aspect has been discussed earlier in this article. When the bank of tasks has been established, then further work will need to be done in responding to the sufficiency issue.

The construct "evidence" is no less problematic. Hagar, Anthanasou and Gonczi (1994) suggest that the forms this might take include project and assignments, problems, case studies and written tests, simulations, skills tests, direct observations in a range of situations, and documentation in the form of portfolios, log books, qualification certificates references, supervisors' reports. The *Certificate of Vocational Access* curriculum recommends that a range of texts from within the factual, persuasive, transactional, procedural, narrative and conversation range as they relate to the students' goals and interests should be used for instructional purposes. The recommended assessment methods are equally comprehensive. They include practical tasks, written tasks, short oral explanations, short oral answers, simulations, role plays and scenarios. No mention is made however, how these might be equated either individually or in sets for validity purpose.

Moderation and review processes

It might be assumed that if there is in place an agreed selection of tasks and accompanying explicit assessment criteria and rubrics, then as long as assessors follow these rubrics and judge competence according to the criteria, then validity conditions will be met. This has not been shown to be the case. Wolf (1991) provides two telling examples in which assessors were shown to be highly unreliable both between themselves and during remarking processes, even after training. Along with others such as Harris, Lundberg, Hobart and Guthrie (1995), she warns that we must accept that "perfect transparency" (p.17) cannot be obtained in any competency-based assessment process. In addition to ensuring that the assessment criteria are as clear as possible, three other conditions should apply. Exemplars should be provided, training should be available to assessors, and marking systems should be monitored at regular intervals. Because of the need for cross-crediting at the upper levels of the *Certificate of Vocational Access* curriculum, it will be necessary to implement Wolf's recommendation at a systemic level.

Cope et al. (1994) support the view that moderation is at the centre of good assessment practices and provide a number of assessment principles that they urge should be accepted by the field. These have been collapsed into the following three principles.

- There is evidence that all providers have a formalised moderation procedure in place and that teachers have access to banks of moderated assessment tasks and criteria.
- There is evidence that all adult literacy teachers participate in at least a local level of moderation.
- Moderation structures exist across providers.

The systemic adoption of these principles should be taken up. However, we must be conscious of Linn's (1994) warning that such a system can develop into a bureaucratic control measure. Practitioners themselves should be involved in this work which could take the form of action learning processes.

Assessment within a performance-based framework

While the VEETAC framework provided valuable guidance in our reflection on best practice in assessment, we found we preferred an alternative model that was developed by Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991) to inform performance-based outcome practice in the United States. This framework proposed that the following set of eight criteria be used as a basis for evaluating assessment.

Consequences

Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991) emphasise the centrality of a consideration of the intended and unintended effects of assessment on those who have a stake in the process, primarily, teachers and students. One result of formalised assessment processes is the improbable washback effect on teaching and learning. Smith, a Director in TAFE in Queensland (1994:8), claims that "CBT provides a major window of opportunity for vocational educators to position assessment as a truly integral part of teaching and learning". This may, or may not occur. Improved delivery was an intended outcome of performance testing in the United States but research has shown that this was not always realised (Guskey, 1994).

The issue of consequence, however, affects groups other than teachers and learners. Those with a particular interest in assessment results might include course administrators, employers, job placement officers, the Australian National Training Authority or the Department of Employment, Education and Training, Commonwealth Employment Services or private placement officers. Each of these may have somewhat differing needs of assessment systems and may place varying constraints on curricula decisions. Catering to these diverse demands is not easy.

Moss (1994:6) suggests that a more comprehensive definition of validity ought to stress the value of "*balancing* differing concerns" as long as "acceptable levels are achieved for particular purposes of assessment". A similar position, defined as "a process of risk management" is adopted by Harris, Guthrie, Hobart and Lundberg (1995:162). Taking the examples of an airline pilot and a doctor, where credentials confer high status and assume high levels of responsibility, the authors suggest that there are some contexts in which assessment processes should be more rigorous than others. Thus, the "consequences" issue must be addressed in moderation sessions, particularly when considering the upper levels of the curriculum where credit transfers to other courses operate.

Fairness

The criteria of fairness is one of the major criteria delineated within the VEETAC framework (1993). It is interesting to note that it is not included within a validity category in this work. There are four principles relating to fairness in the Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991) model:

- Assessment practices and methods must be impartial. No specific groups should be disadvantaged.
- Assessment procedures and criteria must be transparent to all potential assessees.
- A participatory approach should be employed with process jointly developed and/or agreed between assessors and assessees.
- Challenges to assessment processes must be available.

However, in any consideration of fairness, there is an assumption that society is value-free. This is obviously not so. Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991) cite a range of evidence to support the presence of bias in results because of differences in task familiarity, exposure and motivation amongst different groups as well as rater responses in the United States. It is too early to know whether such differences exist in relation to the *Certificate in Vocational Access* curriculum but they are likely and will need to be addressed.

Transferability and generalisability

This third criterion in Linn, Baker and Dunbar's framework has been of particular interest to Billett, a vocational education and training researcher at Griffith University. Following on the earlier work by Green (1989) and other cognitive psychologists, Billett (1994) proposes a number of features in learning settings that contribute to generalisations and transfer to other settings. These are: the learning experiences should match those performed in the real world as directly as possible; the total range of these experiences should be presented; and the knowledge and the skills underlying the experiences should be made explicit and practised to the extent that students can use effective problem-solving strategies to deal with related tasks.

This list has implications for both teachers and assessors. Adult literacy teachers have been involved in providing courses within a range of workplace settings and are now developing expertise in understanding the discourses within them. However, this is not the case for community settings, particularly those of the students who are likely to be enrolled in the Personal Focus strand of the *Certificate of Vocational Access* curriculum. Currently, we are in danger of writing into curricula outcomes, tasks and assessment criteria that reflect our own values and understandings, rather than those of our potential students. The recent studies by Bull and Anstey (1994), Breen et al. (1994) and Freebody and Ludwig (1995) where they documented a range of literacy practices across groups and settings will assist in developing this knowledge, but more needs to be done. However, even when we can choose appropriate activities, the selection of criteria that taps the underlying knowledge and skills, including metacognitive ones, will not be easy. Finally the sampling of these tasks into constellations that ensure similarity or equivalence, as noted above, will continue to be problematic.

Cognitive complexity

The concept of task complexity is one of the major features underpinning the *Certificate of Vocational Access* curriculum. For example, the fifth learning outcome in the module LIT111, Literacy and Language Personal Focus Level 1A requires competent assessees to be able to "use short, explicit, pictorial/symbolic language, literacy and numeracy texts related to commonly used procedures for completing relevant tasks to meet the learner's individual goals". In contrast, the fifth learning outcome of the module, LIT115, Level 3B of the same focus, the second highest in the certificate, requires competent assessees to be able to "use literacy and language texts of extended length concerning unfamiliar procedures that are related to tasks relevant to learner's goals". The constructs that are pivotal to determining complexity in the curriculum are length of text, transparency, familiarity, graphic was presentation and regularity of use. These same constructs should be assessed through the specific criteria developed to determine competence on the various outcomes.

Content quality

While the *Certificate of Vocational Access* curriculum has a rich theoretical foundation, as evidenced by the references to the document, only two theoretical impositions are made explicit within the work. These are: a functional language model which aims to describe language in use (Rothery, 1992); and a socio-cognitive model based on a particular text defining the role of the four constitutive roles of readers proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990). It is not easy for many practitioners, particularly those in remote regions, to access reference material. As a result, future curricula will need to state explicitly within the text itself the research base of our work in adult literacy. This extended, detailed research support will also assist in the defence of competency decisions (Cope et al., 1994), if and when they arise.

Content coverage

This criterion has already been addressed by discussion of the earlier criteria within the VEETAC Framework document relating to breadth of assessment processes.

Meaningfulness

As Linn, Baker and Dunbar (1991:20) claim, "like motherhood and apple pie", meaningfulness should have a place in a set of criteria for evaluating assessment. The authors interpret the concept of "meaningfulness" in terms of authenticity of tasks. This factor is central to the adoption of both competency-based systems in Australia (Billett, 1994) and performance-outcomes in the United States (Messick, 1994). Meaningfulness can also apply to the relationship between specific outcomes and their related requirements to demonstrate competence in this outcome. If these are seen to be closely related, then it is likely that students will remain interested in participating in assessment processes and learn from the assessment experience.

Cost and efficiency

Economic and efficiency considerations, the final criteria in Linn, Baker and Dunbar's (1991) list, are leitmotifs that continue to recur throughout vocational training policy documents. However, they must be counterpoised by other factors such as ensuring that there are multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate competence and establishing systemic monitoring procedures to ensure that assessment processes are valid. These steps will contribute to effectiveness and ultimately efficiency, but they will come at a price.

Draft criteria for evaluating assessment tasks, criteria and rubrics

Because of its comprehensiveness and applicability, the model by Linn et al., comprising the eight criteria discussed above, will be used as a guide for further work in the moderation of the assessment tasks, assessment criteria and rubrics provided by adult literacy teachers for this purpose.

Specifically, the following questions, in their current draft form, will be used by adult literacy teachers to determine the appropriateness of the assessment examples in future moderation work.

- Is the context for the task stated? Is the task requirement stated clearly? Are the assessment criteria stated clearly?
- Is the learning outcome addressed sufficiently by the type of assessment task chosen? Is the learning outcome tested both as a whole and through its components by the assessment criteria chosen?
- Does the level of complexity of the task and the assessment criteria match the level inherent in the outcome statement?
- Are the assessment task and criteria as authentic as possible?
- Are the task and criteria likely to be meaningful to the assessee?
- Is this task cost effective and efficient?
- Does the criteria address knowledge and skills that could be generalised to another context?

Action learning/action research process

The brief that guided our proposal for this study stipulated that an action research process would be adopted. Action research methods have become popular with teachers in Australia, largely due to the work of Kemmis and his colleagues (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) over the past fifteen years. In contrast, within the vocational education sector, action learning has been actively promoted. For example, substantial funding has been, and continues to be available through the National Staff Development Committee to encourage employees to engage in action learning processes to improve their practices.

In this study, we attempted to tease out the differences between the concepts "action research" and "action learning" in order to situate our work. There are a number of common features. In both approaches, participants work collaboratively and reflectively on an issue or issues that originate within their own social environments with the purpose of enacting change (McNiff, 1992). However, while people primarily engage in forms of action learning to develop their personal or professional competencies, action researchers take this process one step further. Ballantyne, Bruce and Packer (1993) differentiate between action learning and action research by claiming that "action research tends to be more deliberate, systematic and rigorous than action learning and places greater emphasis on the evaluation and reporting of results".

Taking this model, then, we concluded that the participants in our study initially engaged in an action learning method. Subsequently, the authors engaged in action research through examining and reflecting on the extensive body of research literature dealing with assessment of both competencies and performance outcomes. As a result, it is envisaged that the participants will engage in a further action learning stage in 1996. Figure 2 shows the process that was adopted in our study.

STEPS IN MODERATION PROJECT

Step 1
Reflection on assessment knowledge and experience
Collection of examples of tasks, criteria, rubrics and student responses

Step2
Shared assessment with colleagues of tasks, criteria, rubrics and student responses provided

Step 3
Incorporation of approved tasks into McAdam collection
Separation of assessment tasks from teaching materials in McAdam collection

Step 4
Shared assessment with colleagues of tasks, criteria and rubrics for modules 111, 112 and 113, Personal Focus, in McAdam's collection

Step 5
Examination of assessment research and reflection
Refinement of assessment criteria for tasks, criteria and rubrics

Figure 2

The following discussion elaborates on the five steps taken.

Step 1

During the first stage of the project the project team prepared and distributed a letter to all adult literacy coordinators throughout the State inviting them to participate in the study by providing assessment tasks and student responses in the Personal Focus for moderation. The response to this invitation was limited. On reflection, one reason may have been that, unknown to the project team, Laura McAdam from Logan Institute of TAFE had just previously invited TAFE coordinators to provide assessment tasks and lesson materials for the Personal and Employment strands with the purpose of collating these in a publication that would be available to teachers working in TAFE institutes in Queensland. A second reason may be that the timing of the request was too early. While the curriculum, *Certificate of Vocational Access*, was generally introduced during the first semester of 1995, coordinators may not have felt confident in sharing their assessment tasks at this stage.

Step 2

Despite the paucity of materials that were available for sharing, a workshop was held with twenty-five local adult literacy practitioners to evaluate the assessment tasks and student responses that had been gathered. A proforma had been developed by the project team and was available for use by the workshop participants. The mood of the workshop was very supportive of the project. In addition, comments such as: "My standards have been too low when assessing students", and the reverse, were voiced. This session corroborated the contention by Lyons which was reported in Cope et al. (1994:59) that:

> Moderation helps education and training providers to apply and interpret standards within a credential in the same way. It allows us to verify that assessment processes and decisions, particularly those critical to the attainment of credentials, are valid and consistent - that is, they assess fairly what they are meant to assess and are reliable.

Step 3

Following the moderation session, the participants' responses were examined. Those assessment tasks that were rejected were removed from the collection. A further finding was that there was no unanimity regarding the value of assessment tasks that were being used by practitioners within the TAFE system. Thus, a decision was made to limit the study to assessment tasks, assessment criteria and rubrics.

At this time the project under the direction of Laura McAdam, a teacher at Logan Institute of TAFE became known. The aim of this team was to collect assessment items and teaching resources relating to the Personal and Employment strands of the *Certificate of Vocational Access* that were being used by literacy teachers in Queensland. A further decision was made to incorporate the assessment examples of the Personal strand into our collection. A further task was the evaluation and drafting of the assessment criteria sheet that had been used for the moderation session in the previous step in the project.

Step 4

A second session was held with colleagues to moderate the assessment tasks, assessment criteria and rubrics in the Personal Focus aspect of the McAdam collection. Although the proforma that had been used in Step 2 was again employed, the task was very time consuming. Those present, however, expressed support for the opportunity to participate in this work.

A further problem which arose was that no specific assessment criteria had been developed to ensure that the assessment by the participants in this session could be replicated. This situation would appear to be typical of action learning processes.

Step 5

Extensive research and reflection relating to the assessment of performance outcomes have taken place in the United States, and it seemed crucial that we should access this work with a view to adding depth and validity to the project. After examining this literature, the set of assessment criteria that are listed above were adopted by the project team.

Future

It is anticipated that adult literacy coordinators and teachers throughout Queensland will be invited to examine the assessment tasks in the Personal Focus aspect of the McAdam collection. The results of this further work will be published in a booklet and distributed throughout the State.

Discussion

This small research project has added to the body of evidence showing that action learning/research can contribute to both the personal and professional competence of participants. Further, by accessing the research literature on the assessment of performance outcomes and developing a theoretically-based model for evaluating assessment tasks, criteria and rubrics, the work has been sharpened. However, there are wider issues that need to be considered in the delivery of adult literacy programs.

In the introduction, two paradigms of ignorance were noted. This study has dealt with the first: namely filling in the "blank spots" - taking the student assessment within the *Certificate of Vocational Access* a step further through moderation processes. It is important, as well, to consider the environment in which this research project is positioned and to examine the "blind spots" in current notions of best practice. As noted briefly in the first section of this report, the adoption of a competency-based approach is problematic and the application of the theoretical underpinnings of the *Certificate of Vocational Access* may not be the most appropriate model for the field.

One of the assumptions on which a competency-based system is based, is that it is possible to capture the essential knowledge and skill underpinning performance within pre-specified assessment tasks and criteria. At this time, it is not known whether this is possible. The continuing work of cognitive scientists, both in the United States and in Australia, is likely to inform our practice but there is still much to be learned. A further limitation experienced by practitioners in the adult literacy field is our incapacity to distinguish between poor performances that are due to limited cognitive functioning and poor performances due to limited opportunities (Campione & Brown, 1990).

Taking a broader view, the recent emphasis on training for employment appears to be unnecessarily limiting in the adult literacy field. Adult literacy programs have traditionally catered for the diverse needs of prospective students. These have included family needs such as helping children cope with their school demands as well as participating in more general community activities. The authors of the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (1994) recognised this tradition and built into their model the scope for curricula to continue to meet non-employment needs. Other researchers such as Porter (1990) and Stevenson (1992) both support the view that focusing on employment needs ignores both the personal and social needs of individuals.

There is recognition, however, in the Australian National Training Authority Act of 1992 for the promotion of "advanced technical training and further education opportunities" (Crombie, 1995:3) for the community as well as for the workforce. These further opportunities have been interpreted as continuing throughout a person's life. How these opportunities can best be translated into curricula remains an issue.

In the case of the Queensland curriculum, the *Certificate of Vocational Access,* which is structurally based on the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (1994), the question Auerbach asked at the Australian Council for Adult Literacy in Perth in 1994 is still relevant: Are the four foci of employment, personal, vocational and workplace, and the six aspects of identity, group, organisations, community, procedures and technology the most useful structures for developing a literacy curriculum? While this model was reflective of the field's understanding at that time, is it still appropriate? Or might other models serve us better?

Spady (1994:22-23) has offered one model for consideration. He identifies ten clusters of social roles called "Fundamental Life Performance Roles", that he considers essential for successful participation in society. These range from citizen and parent through to employer and worker and are consistent with the roles identified in the 1991 SCAN report that has been used by a number of states in North America to frame their performance outcome strategies. No doubt there are other models that could be considered.

More thought also needs to be given to moderation issues. In the short term, if acceptable levels of parity are to be recognised it is imperative that moderation processes are in place to firstly, choose assessment tasks that meet specific outcomes, ensure that their accompanying criteria and instructions are clear and appropriate, and then determine standards for student responses to these tasks. This report has detailed how initial work in this process has taken place. Further steps are now required to ensure that the necessary development work occurs. If it becomes obvious in the future that a competency-based approach is too limiting for our field and the wider vocational education context, then it will, in part, be in response to the action learning and action research work in projects such as this which attempted to fill in the blank spots in the assessment of competencies.

Ann Kelly
Southbank Institute of TAFE

Acknowledgment

I wish to thank my colleague Sharon Mullins for her invaluable assistance and the many colleagues who contributed in various ways to our developing knowledge during this project.

References

Auerbach, E. (1994). Walking the competence tightrope. Paper presented at the Australian Council for Adult Literacy conference, Perth, July 1992.

Australian Council for Adult Literacy. (1992). *The adult literacy & numeracy scales: the A CAL view*. Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

Ballantyne, R. Bruce, C. & Packer, J. (1993). *Action learning in vocational education and training: theoretical background. Volume 1*. Chadstone, Vic: National Staff Development Committee.

Biggs, J. (1994). Learning outcomes: Competence or expertise? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Educational Research*, 2(1), 1-18.

Billett, S. (1994). Searching for authenticity: a socio-cultural perspective of vocational skill development. *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, 46(1), 3-16.

Breen, M. P., Louden, W., Barrett-Pugh, C., Rivalland, J., Rohl, M., Rhydwen, M., Lloyd, S., Carr, T. (1994). *Literacy in its place: literacy practices in urban and rural communities.* Volumes 1 and 2. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Bull, G. and Anstey, M. (1994). *Adult literacy practices in rural communities*. Brisbane: NLLIA.

Burrows, C. (1994). The AMEP meets CBT: A literature review. *Prospect*, 9(2), 18-29.

Campione J. L. & Brown, A. (1990). Guided learning and transfer: implications for approaches to assessment. In Norman Frederiksen, Robert Glaser, Alan Lesgold and Michael G. Shafto. (Eds.). *Diagnostic monitoring of skill and knowledge acquisition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Certificate of Vocational Access. (No publishing details provided)

Cope, B., Solomon, N., Kapitzke, C., Plimer, D., McNamara, T., Brown, A., Scheeres, H., Slade, D., Hill, K. & Pritchard, R., (1994) *Australian Language and Literacy Policy 1994 Project #3: Assessment and moderation process in adult literacy and adult ESL in tendered labour market programs*. University of Technology, Sydney and James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville: NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, Don Plimer Consultancies and The University of Melbourne: NLLIA Language Testing Research Centre.

Crombie, A., (1995). ACE and ANTA - the way ahead: extracts from the AAACE submission to the review of the ANTA agreement. *AAACE News*, November 1995, 1-5.

Freebody, P. & Ludwig, C. (1995) *Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic urban communities: a descriptive and interpretive research program.* Executive Summary. Melbourne: Curriculum Corporation.

Freebody, P. and Luke, A. (1990) ' Literacies' programs: debates and demands in cultural context. *Prospect*, 53, 7-16.

Gonczi, A., Hagar, P., & Anthanasou J. (1993) *A guide to the development of competency-based assessment strategies for the professions*. National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition Research Paper, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Services.

Greeno, J. G. (1989) A perspective on thinking. *American Psychologist*, 44, 134-141.

Griffin, P. & Forwood, A. (1991) *Adult literacy and numeracy competency scales*. Melbourne: Assessment Resource Centre, Phillip Institute of Technology.

Guskey, T. R. (1994) What you assess may not be what you get. *Educational Researcher*, 23(9), 51-54.

Hagar, P. Anthanasou, J. & Gonczi A. (1994). *Assessment: technical manual*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Hall, B. (1995/6) A question of assessment. *Australian Training Review, December, 1995/January/February 1996, 15-17.*

Harris, R. Lundberg, D., Hobart, B. & Guthrie, H. 1995. *Competency-based education and training: Between a rock and a whirlpool.* South Melbourne, Vic.: Macmillan.

International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English. (1994). *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing*. IRA/NCTE.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (1982) *The action research planner*. Waurn Ponds, Vic.: Deakin University.

Linn, R. L. (1994). Performance assessment: Policy promises and technical measurement standards. *Educational Researcher*, 23(9), 4-14.

Linn, R. L., Baker, E. L. & Dunbar, S. B. (1991). Complex, performance-based assessment: Expectations and validation criteria. *Educational Researcher*, 20(8), 15-21.

Lyons, S. (1994) *An assessment guide for adult basic education programs in Victoria*. Victoria: The Adult, Community and Further Education Board.

McNiff, J. (1992) *Action research: principles and practice*. London: Routledge.

Messick, S. (1994) The interplay of evidence and consequences in the validation of performance assessments. *Educational Researcher*, 23(2), 13-23.

Moss, P. A. (1994) Can there be validity without reliability? Educational Researcher, 23(2), 5-12.

National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence. (1994). Melbourne: ACTRAC.

Porter, P. (1990). Education, economics and culture. *QTU Professional Magazine*. October, 3-6

Purdey, M. (1994) In all things moderation. *Fine Print*, Autumn, 21-22.

Rothery, J. (1992) Assessing children's writing. In Beverly Derewianka (ed.)*Language assessment in primary classrooms*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Shavelson, R. J., Baxter, Gail P. & Pine, Jerry. (1992). Performance assessments: political, rhetorical and measurement validity. *Educational Researcher*.

Smith, L. (1994) Competency-based training: TAFE Queensland's concept. *Skillsling*, 3, May 1994, 8-9.

Soucek, V. (1993). Is there a need to redress the balance between systems goals and life-world-oriented goals in public education in Australia? In Cherry Collins. (ed.) Competencies.' *The competencies debate in Australian education and training*. Deakin, ACT: Australian College of Education.

Spady, J. (1994) Choosing outcomes of significance. *Educational Leadership*, 51(6), 18-22.

Stevenson, J. (1992)'Contradictions, complications and competencies: Who cares?'

Keynote address at national conference, Student Services - A bridge to success, Brisbane, October, 1992.

Stevenson, J. (1993) A knowledge perspective on curricula for a desirable future. New Horizons in Education. 88, 3-13.

Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (1993) *Framework for the implementation of a competency-based vocational education and training system*. Canberra: VEETAC.

Wagner, J. (1993) Ignorance in educational research: Or, how can you not know that? *Educational Researcher*, 22(5), 15-23.

Wolf, A. (1991) Assessing core skills: wisdom or wild goose chase? *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 21(2), 189-201.

Wolf, A. (1995). Authentic assessments in a competitive sector: Institutional prerequisites and cautionary tales. In Harry Torrance. (ed.) *Evaluating authentic assessment.' Problems and possibilities in new approaches to assessment*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

MODERATION OF COMPETENCY-BASED ASSESSMENT: ISSUES AND PRACTICE IN ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY

John Bailey
Pam Weston
Shirley Verrall
Jeremy Audas

BACKGROUND

Competency based training and competency based assessment in the field of Literacy and Numeracy have now been incorporated into the curriculum CNLO3, Certificate in Vocational Access. CBT module learning outcomes usually describe skills, standards and conditions of performance. However, this curriculum does not incorporate any explicit standards and rarely a performance condition. The learning outcomes are based on the ACTRAC National Framework of Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competency (1993). The National Framework does not provide a set of Language, Literacy and Numeracy standards, nor is it developmental. Therefore, the standards are implied in the learning outcomes. This causes great difficulty for teachers designing assessment tasks and carrying out assessments.

In literacy education it is especially important that teachers not become merely transmitters of systemic curricula and assessment procedures, but that they themselves play a major role in determining learning outcomes and assessment strategies in collaboration with learners (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989). A criterion- referenced approach to assessment can meet the requirements of accountability (to funding bodies) while also being compatible with a learner-centred curriculum (Brindley, 1989).

The significance of this project is that it provides some applied research into CBT assessment moderation. Any training provider must be able to demonstrate the consistency of outcomes and quality processes to clients. It is essential that Literacy and Numeracy teachers be able to demonstrate accountability and educationally defensible processes of moderation of assessments within CBT curricula.

As the curriculum CNL03 is used state wide throughout Queensland this research was conducted within the framework of TAFE Queensland Assessment principles.

INTRODUCTION

Description of Project

The project was designed to trial a methodology for moderation of competency based assessment in the literacy/numeracy field within the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE. An action learning team was formed to carry out the project. This team was made up of literacy and numeracy practitioners from three campuses of the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (Townsville, Burdekin and Charters Towers). The three campuses service entirely different regions and clientele.

The Townsville campus is a large centre catering for a population in excess of 120,000 people. Most of those who access this campus are urban dwellers. The Burdekin campus caters for a large sugar growing community which means most of the clients who attend classes there are from rural backgrounds. The campus at Charters Towers is more isolated and caters for a clientele from widely scattered grazing and mining communities.

At these campuses CNLO3 is delivered in a number of ways. These include a Volunteer Tutor Programme, individual learning centres, and full- and part-time classes. The Personal Focus, level 1A and 1B were chosen as these were delivered across the three sites.

Clients who enrol in CNLO3 in Townsville are from English speaking backgrounds as at Townsville there is a Migrant Education Unit which caters for the needs of those from Non English Speaking backgrounds. In contrast at Charters Towers and Burdekin migrants sometimes participate in literacy classes.

All age groups are represented in the client groups at all three sites. There are also learners with physical or intellectual disabilities enrolled in CNLO3. This is in keeping with the kinds of students found in TAFE colleges across the states, however, because of numbers in the smaller campuses the classes can often be of mixed ability. In all of these classes there were students enrolled in levels 1A and 1B which further supported the research team's choice of these modules for moderation.

After an initial meeting, members of the research team returned to their respective campuses to design assessment tasks. These were trialed and then at subsequent meetings they were analysed and moderated before arriving at a final draft of the assessment items which were compiled into booklet form for further trials. The outcomes of these trials led to the research team undertaking a detailed process of moderation before producing the final booklet of assessment items.

PROCESS

An initial meeting was held to discuss the project. Operational procedures were agreed on and it was decided that each participant would keep a reflective journal. Timelines for the project were discussed and agreed upon. Minute taking was shared and an electronic white board used to keep a record of proceedings. It was felt that we could modify the process according to changing circumstances, this being an essential component of action research. Release time for teaching staff was negotiated and the issue of transport for members of the group from outlying campuses was resolved. Six teachers from across the Institute discussed the methodology of action research and a National Staff Development video on action learning was viewed. Issues in the video were discussed and proved to be very helpful in understanding the kinds of processes which are appropriate to an action learning project.

At this point we decided on the modules from CNL03 for moderation and the development of assessment tasks. As the majority of students were enrolling in the lower level modules we would focus on LIT111 and LIT112, level 1A and 1B from the Certificate in Vocational Access, Personal Focus.

The group then discussed the TAFE assessment principles document and examined the English Language Training Programs Model Language Assessment Tasks. This revealed that these would provide a good model for developing literacy assessment tasks but would need modification in terms of the actual tasks to be included in literacy assessment.

The next activity was to analyse the criteria for developing assessment tasks. The main issues here were the need to use authentic texts, acknowledgment of sources and copyright, meeting the TAFE assessment principles, ensuring that the tasks were valid and reliable and making explicit the standards and conditions for each task.

Much discussion and negotiation took place at this stage of the project and, in fact, throughout the life of the project. There was constant reflection and review of what we were doing and where we were going. This was seen as an integral part of the process and added to the sharing of information and skills.

It was emphasised that teachers must be assisted in developing good management strategies when implementing assessment tasks with students. These need to be in line with Quality Assurance policies and procedures at respective sites.

The second meeting focussed on an examination of the various assessment tasks related to LIT111 and LIT112 (level 1A and 1B, Personal Focus) which teachers had brought with them. Some of these tasks were developed by local teachers and others were from other curricula. One member had already designed a holistic task which assessed all six outcomes of LIT111 in one instrument. The ensuing discussion clarified some of the issues at stake, a great number of positive comments about the holistic model added to the impetus to design tasks which were "student friendly". It was agreed that as far as possible, without being contrived, the tasks should not address individual outcomes but deal with more than one outcome at a time. This was in keeping with the TAFE assessment principles and teachers thought that from the student's point of view it was desirable to use this approach. It was refreshing to hear teachers talking about assessment being student centred and not just a way of meeting the teachers' (and the curriculum's) administrative needs.

There were some animated discussions about how best to present the assessment tasks in their published form, that is, how the final product layout should look. Should we include the entire wording of the outcomes as it appeared in the syllabus document or could we modify this to suit our needs? It was decided that we really had no authority to modify the wording. These discussions were kept at a forceful yet friendly level which seemed to indicate the degree to which assessment was a contentious issue in literacy circles.

From time to time the group, in its enthusiasm during these discussions, would get off track but someone would always bring this to the attention of the others and we would refocus. These moments allowed us to become aware of the wide range of issues associated with the development of assessment tasks and how the views of all participants were valued as contributions to the whole project. In addition it indicated that the action research process was working as it should, being reflective, self monitoring and using all the skills and abilities of the participants.

The following five meetings were clearly focussed on the task and although there were many side issues of interest to the whole group we were able to maintain focus and complete the requirements for each meeting. All of the meetings generated a better understanding of literacy assessment tasks as well as reinforcing the cyclical nature of action research. In between meetings tasks that were developed in the second and subsequent meetings were trialed with currently enrolled students at the various campuses. This enabled the group to analyse each others' experiences with the tasks given to their students which further clarified not only the shortcomings and benefits of the various tasks but also the group members' perceptions of assessment and its role in literacy learning. Once the assessment items had been modified and trialed the final format of their publication was decided upon. It had to be clearly emphasised that the product we were developing was a model of literacy assessment tasks and would need to be adapted for teachers to use in other locations. For example, one task required students to read a bus timetable - for the sake of authenticity a timetable appropriate to the local environment would have to be substituted for the one suggested in the model task.

When the final meeting had been held we all agreed that the tasks we had developed and trialed were appropriate and that the students who had attempted them had found that they were commensurate with their abilities. They were certainly deemed to be valid in that they measured what they were supposed to and reliable to the extent that the variety of students undertook the tasks and were able to complete them at similar levels.

The next step was to employ a desktop publisher to produce the tasks in a booklet form which was easy to use with clear guidelines and instructions.

OUTCOMES

From entries in the journals kept by the participants during the course of the project it is obvious that there is a real need to customise assessment tasks to suit local conditions. With regards to the holistic task concerning the snack bar all centres noted that students were able to complete the tasks successfully as ordering food from a snack bar is something they are familiar with and they were able to relate the activity to an actual place they knew.

However, with regards to tasks that required knowledge of timetables and suburbs, students in the smaller centres had problems completing the tasks as they were not familiar with the concepts involved. At one centre, in order to complete the exercise, the teacher had to explain what a suburb was and how boundaries were formed. This led to other exercises such as map reading. The teacher also found it necessary to teach her students how to read timetables. Because these kinds of activities are not of everyday concern to her students the teacher involved thought that perhaps what had been taught would not be retained for long. This reinforces the idea that literacy assessment tasks require adaptation to the local environment in order to increase their relevancy.

It was noted by teachers in each of the centres that students responded best to tasks that were of personal relevance to them. This raises the question of how to design and moderate assessment tasks that can be used in different places for different kinds of clientele.

During the course of discussing the implementation of the tasks contained in the booklet it soon became clear that teachers had problems with constructing and delivering assessment tasks based on given learning outcomes, particularly those of the Personal Focus strand. It was noted by all involved in the project that the majority of students we deal with enrol in literacy courses and the Individual Learning Centres for their own purposes. They are adults and in the main know what it is they want to learn and they have a wealth of hitherto unrecognised previous learning. For these reasons it is important that assessment tasks need to be related to the individual needs of the students. Tailoring these needs to suit given learning outcomes is not an easy task.

It was decided that the best way to achieve this was to discuss the stated outcomes in relationship to the students' own particular needs and the training content. This takes time and how tasks could be moderated across an Institute such as the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, let alone the TAFE Queensland system was of concern to the teachers involved in the project.

From these discussions some important questions arose. One concerns the desirability of designing generic tasks for literacy students. It was thought that it would be more appropriate for assessment to become an integral part of the teaching process and that both the content of the course and the assessment tasks be negotiated with the students before the course begins. Another concern expressed was that some teachers felt outcomes were not able to be taught to enable students to complete the assessment tasks. They felt uncomfortable with the idea that teachers could observe students' day to day work and tick off successfully completed criteria rather than have students undertake a more formal assessment.

ISSUES

One of the main issues raised by members of the research team was that of Competency Based Training and its applicability to adult literacy teaching. While it is possible to match the needs of individual students to the generic outcomes offered in CNLO3, The Certificate in Vocational Access, it is often not the most efficient or effective way of addressing students' needs. The ability of literacy teachers to develop a range of reliable and valid assessment instruments to match the outcomes of the course and remain relevant and in an appropriate context requires a huge amount of work, even if models of assessment are available. It could be argued, quite rightly, that this is part and parcel of teaching yet it does demand an extraordinary amount of work when compared with developing assessment instruments for say, an office studies course. No single instrument will be relevant for every student in every context. That is why the group has emphasised the idea that the assessment items developed for this project are models only and require reworking and adapting to suit the needs of a wide range of students with differing needs.

Perhaps Competency Based Training is not the best way of teaching and learning literacy and a more student centred and contextually appropriate method might be devised, particularly when no industry standards for literacy exist. The curriculum currently being used in Queensland was developed from the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence (ACTRAC, 1993) and was certainly developed along sound theoretical lines but in putting theory into practice the curriculum has become something of a behemoth - problematic in terms of the way outcomes are stated and difficult to implement in terms of assessment processes.

The research group wrestled with these ideas and much discussion was generated. It was clear on reflection that the action learning process enabled the group to express widely held views and beliefs in a supportive environment enabling issues such as the above to be expressed to colleagues. We realised that we were all in the same boat with regards to assessment of literacy students and that it is very easy to steer the course of least resistance which may not be in the best interests of students. As has been mentioned previously in this chapter, literacy students come to classes with a wealth of prior learning with no two students being alike in the context of that learning. To enable teachers to assess appropriately it was felt that the best we could do was to encourage teachers to use adapted models of assessment, however, even with the best of intentions the adaptations of existing models might still not meet the needs of individual students especially if prior learning is not taken into account.

Another issue of note, and not concerning the task but the process, was the amount of time required for action research. We felt that the time we had was limited and that there was pressure to deal with the immediate task. More time for general discussion would have been appreciated because this kind of discussion often uncovers some of the deeper issues pertaining to the task, especially philosophical issues related to literacy learning and assessment. Certainly discussion continued outside the meeting times but this was limited due to pressure of work and geographic encumbrances. Perhaps our first meeting could have been devoted to a discussion of our own philosophical positions.

John Bailey
Townsville Campus - The Barrier Institute of TAFE

Pam Weston
Charters Towers Campus

Shirley Verrall
Burdekin Campus

Jeremy Audas
Townsville Campus

Appendix

THE ASSESSMENT EXEMPLARS

INTRODUCTION

Competency based training and competency based assessment in the field of literacy and numeracy has been delivered in TAFE Queensland since June 1994. The competencies are designated as Learning Outcomes which are based on the ACTRAC National Framework of AduLt English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competency (1993). The National Framework does not provide a set of Language, Literacy and Numeracy standards, nor is it developmental. Therefore the standards are implied in the learning outcomes. This causes great difficulty for teachers designing assessment tasks and carry out assessments.

This booklet was produced as the result of a small project trialing an action learning methodology. A team of practitioners of language and literacy modules representing three sites of the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (Townsville, Burdekin, Charters Towers) designed and trialed assessment tasks in at least one class at each campus. These "classes" included face to face and independent learning centres.

The team met on three occasions. Firstly, to plan the project. Secondly, to devise assessment tasks to be trialed across the Institute. Finally, to modify the original tasks based on student responses to them. The tasks are related to Modules LIT111 and LIT112, Literacy and Language, Personal Focus - levels 1A and 1B as these were the only modules offered at all three sites.

Those involved in the project were:
John Bailey - Facilitator (Townsville)

Pam Weston	(Charters Towers)
Shirley Verrall	(Burdekin)
Jeremy Audas	(Townsville)

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A
Learning Outcome: 1	Read and write very short, explicit, personal information related to the learner's identity and relevant to individual goals, e.g. personal bills, appointment cards, personal details card, date of birth, a greeting on a card, expressing opinion.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Complete a clearly set-out form with family name, first name, address, age, or next of kin, according to the following: ⇒ write legibly in block letters ⇒ write the details accurately from memory ⇒ spell with a reasonable degree of accuracy b) Interpret an account: ⇒ state the amount owing ⇒ state the date of the account ⇒ identify who the account is from ⇒ show an understanding of what the account means, e.g. I owe the doctor $22.00.
Assessment Method:	⇒ written task 1a. ⇒ short oral answer 1b.
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a teacher/learner selected, relevant document (realistic or simulated) requiring completion of basic personal details, e.g. personal details form for class records. ⇒ a teacher/learner selected familiar account which is explicit and clearly formatted, e.g. doctor's bill, tradesperson's account. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A
Learning Outcome: 2	Read and record very short, explicit, context-embedded texts associated with membership of and interaction within a relevant group e.g. in the family; community group; members of class; friends.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Prepare a list of names (minimum 3) of significant members of relevant group in order to complete a relevant task, e.g. guest list for party; Christmas card list; list of names of class members for tea and coffee; list of family members for Christmas shopping according to the following: ⇒ write the names from memory ⇒ write the names so that they can be understood ⇒ look up phone numbers and record accurately ⇒ explain how the spelling of names will be checked before writing.
Assessment Method:	⇒ practical task - look for names in phone book. ⇒ written task - record names
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a teacher identified situation relevant to the learner. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	**LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A**
Learning Outcome: 3	Explain the meaning of very short, explicit, pictorial texts which are relevant to the learner's interaction with organisations within the community, their goals structures and activities e.g. safety signs, fire exits, bus routes, maps.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Interpret three relevant texts with pictorial/visual clues e.g. map of the building, business hours open, fire exit, warning signs, small shopping centre map according to the following: ⇒ predict meaning of some unknown words aided by the context, the format and symbols ⇒ identify correctly some key words ⇒ provide an adequate explanation for safe usage, as appropriate e.g. which fire exit to use; which assembly point to use; how to find a shop in shopping centre. ⇒ explain how to use the text e.g. bus timetable, local shopping centre map.
Assessment Method:	⇒ practical task ⇒ oral explanation ⇒ simulation ⇒ role play
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ three teacher/learner selected texts which are relevant to the student's goal. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	**LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A**
Learning Outcome: 4	Perform unproblematic, routine oral interactions, such as giving or receiving concrete pieces of information, with relevant members of the community e.g. telephone for an appointment, request information re opening hours.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Perform a simulated oral interaction to gather a single piece of information, date and time, request appointment. ⇒ explain clearly the information to be given or required so that the listener understand and respond appropriately. ⇒ report orally the outcome of the transaction e.g. the appointment is with Dr. Smith at 2.00pm on Friday 6 May. ⇒ interpret the recorded information (e.g. amounts, name, time) accurately. ⇒ describe the strategies used to read materials, to interact with the listener and to record the information: e.g. planning, questions to ask, use of format to find a logo, name and address, matching, rehearsal, greeting, confirmation, repetition, 5W strategy (who, when, where, what, why). ⇒ evaluate the performance. ⇒ use appropriate rules of social etiquette re opening and closing transaction. b) Report and evaluate orally an actual oral interaction that the learner has carried out.
Assessment Method:	⇒ oral explanation ⇒ oral interaction ⇒ practical task ⇒ written task ⇒ role play ⇒ stimulation
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a teacher/ learner identified situation relevant to the learner's interaction with the community; ⇒ an oral description of a scenario relevant to the learner's current role within the community e.g. the need to make an appointment (with doctor, for a driving less, etc); the need to check opening hours of local library the name and phone number of the contact or single-step instructions on how to find the phone number, given the written contact name; ⇒ how to find the phone number given the written contact name; ⇒ pen and paper to record information; ⇒ a telephone to make an actual or simulated dialling; ⇒ a partner who will be co-operative and provide the requested information clearly and will repeat as required (e.g. spell surname, street, name suburb). The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A
Learning Outcome: 5	Use very short, explicit, pictorial/symbolic language, literacy and numeracy texts related to commonly used procedures for completing relevant tasks to meet the learner's individual goals, e.g. short recipes, safety procedures, voting cards, driving guide.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Follow written directions involving pictorial or symbolic language, to carry out 2 relevant tasks, one requiring a written completion task, e.g. follow an uncomplicated recipe, and complete procedures for cleaning floors. ⇒ show adequate understanding of the text to be able to describe the procedure correctly to the teacher or other student ⇒ use strategies such as sequencing and copying to complete single word entries
Assessment Method:	⇒ simulation ⇒ written task ⇒ oral explanation
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ two procedural texts. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT111 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1A
Learning Outcome: 6	Use very short, context-embedded pieces of text related to using new technology and aided by instructions, diagrams and observation of model demonstration according to the following:
Assessment Criteria:	a) Describe or perform a task using selected technology and aided by instructions, diagrams and observation of model demonstration according to the following: ⇒ read or predict the meaning of relevant words, e.g. on, operate, danger, avoid contact with water ⇒ explain the process and the necessary safety procedures orally
Assessment Method:	⇒ oral explanation ⇒ simulation
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ an item of new technology, e.g. equipment such as microwave, machines, photocopier, calculator, video machine, fax machine, automatic food machine, requiring no more than 3 operations and having single word, written warnings, diagrams or instructions; ⇒ an initial demonstration of the use of selected technology. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	**LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B**
Learning Outcome: 1	Use short pieces of oral and written text related to identify and personal needs, e.g. expressing own ideas/opinions (spoken and written), personal details form, diary, sharing family history, setting goals, routine resume.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Complete a set-out form with personal details, past employment, and schooling according to the following: ⇒ write the details accurately from memory ⇒ spell with a fair degree of accuracy ⇒ use resources to find out correct spelling, e.g. telephone book, personal records.
Assessment Method:	⇒ written task 1a.
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a relevant form requiring completion of personal details, past employment and schooling. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	**LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B**
Learning Outcome: 2	Participate in a relevant group interaction using oral and written texts that are short and highly structured e.g. family community group, friends, colleagues, discussions, list of members, diary entry about a meeting.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Read written names relating to membership of a group, e.g. family names, work/team members. b) Observe social conventions of group oral interaction c) Recount orally to a group, the details of an incident or previous experience, e.g. yarn, recount of interesting incident, accident, report according to the following: ⇒ provide sufficient background and detail for the listeners to understand (Student to recount incident/accident/event using cue cards for names of people involved). ⇒ use appropriate vocabulary and language ⇒ provide eye contact with group members and use appropriate gestures ⇒ communicate clearly using appropriate volume and enunciation.
Assessment Method:	⇒ practical task ⇒ oral explanation
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ an actual supportive group of people who are relevant to the learner's goals and needs e.g. class group. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B
Learning Outcome: 3	Use documents that have a defined structure and relate to the learner's interaction with organisations, e.g. rates notice, bills, permission notes from school. driver's licence renewal form, bank forms, timetables, to carry out routine tasks of gathering information and observing relationships, with the aid of format, symbols, numbers and known vocabulary.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Read two documents with defined structure, e.g. car registration, cheque book, school excursion notice b) Respond in writing to same two documents, e.g. cheque, note according to the following: ⇒ explain orally the purpose of the document and locate the main pieces of information ⇒ respond in writing to the document, e.g. writing a cheque ⇒ record written information accurately, using proforma or appropriate layout of written communication ⇒ provide correct information and spelling.
Assessment Method:	⇒ practical task ⇒ written task ⇒ oral explanation ⇒ simulated situation.
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ one relevant document, e.g. registration notice form, one cheque proforma. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B
Learning Outcome: 4	Use short, highly contextualised relevant materials from the community to complete a range of language, literacy and numeracy tasks relevant to the learner's goals, e.g. catalogues, brochures, business cards, newspaper, advertisements, invoices, uncomplicated notes to and from school, short telephone messages, following oral directions from chemist, club membership forms.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Make a simulated telephone call to a service e.g. plumber according to the following: ⇒ follow social conventions of telephone calls such as greetings and courtesy ⇒ record information accurately and legibly; times, dates and cost ⇒ check numbers and details as appropriate.
Assessment Method:	⇒ simulation ⇒ written task
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a telephone message proforma, provide pen and note paper ⇒ a teacher or tutor to play role of plumber. The learner will provide: ⇒ nil.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B
Learning Outcome: 5	Use short, explicit, literacy and language texts related to known procedures for completion of routine tasks relevant to the learner's goals, e.g. routine recipes, instructions on medical products, familiar procedures.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Write a procedure of 5 or more steps, for a frequently performed task, e.g. how to get from A to B, how to change a tyre according to the following: ⇒ provide sufficient information clearly ⇒ order the steps correctly ⇒ use an appropriate format for a procedural text, e.g. action statement ⇒ write steps to perform task with 5 or more steps, e.g. change tyre, make tea, do washing and make checklist for teacher from these. ⇒ include safety factors where necessary ⇒ approximate spelling and use strategies to correct spelling so that the text is understandable.
Assessment Method:	⇒ written task
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: The learner will provide: ⇒ a relevant procedural task.

CNL03 MODULE PLANNER CHART

Module	LIT112 LITERACY AND LANGUAGE PERSONAL FOCUS - LEVEL 1B
Learning Outcome: 6	Use short, relevant, explicit, clearly formatted, literacy and language texts related to technology, e.g. microwave, library index, automatic teller machine, watch, camera, photocopies.
Assessment Criteria:	a) Instruct a teacher/tutor on the use of a machine, e.g. use of fire extinguisher (without operating); use of fax machine, electric stapler, microwave, fast food machine, calculator according to the following: ⇒ show evidence of logical sequence and safety awareness ⇒ speak clearly ⇒ develop checklist for teacher to complete as part of assessment ⇒ explain the meaning of necessary words and symbols on the apparatus, e.g. safety/warning signs, sequence of operations.
Assessment Method:	⇒ practical task ⇒ oral explanation
Assessment Conditions:	The learner will be provided with: ⇒ a relevant technology, if necessary The learner will provide: ⇒ a relevant technology.

Assessment Items for CNL03 Module LIT111 Level 1A

The assessment item for this module is holistic and addresses all six outcomes for the module. Individual items may need to be modified to suit the needs of the local environment and to ensure that they are in an authentic context for students.

MODULE: LIT111 - LEVEL 1A **LO 1,2,3,4,5,6**

You want to apply for a part-time job at *Sam's Snackbar:* Fill in the following sections of the form below

Assessment Criteria

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT E2.2
(USE BLOCK LETTERS)

Head Office
PO Box 151
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Telephone: (07) 369-7156
Fax: (07) 369-7157

Sam's Snackbar
PO Box 452
MOUNTAIN VIEW Q 4821

LO 1 a) **I wish to apply for employment at Sam's Snackbar in**

____
(suburb) (town/city)

DATE OF APPLICATION ________________________
(day) (month) (year)

PERSONAL DETAILS

SURNAME ________________________

GIVEN NAMES ________________________

ADDRESS ________________________

________________ PHONE ________________

DATE OF BIRTH ________________________
(day) (month) (year)

NEXT OF KIN INFORMATION (for emergency purposes)
NAME ________________________
ADDRESS ________________________
PHONE ________________ RELATIONSHIP ________________________

REFEREES

LO 2 a) 1) NAME ________________________ PHONE ____________
2) NAME ________________________ PHONE ____________
3) NAME ________________________ PHONE ____________

Assessment Criteria

MODULE: LIT111

Congratulations! You have received a letter from the Manager of Sam's Snackbar asking you to phone in for an appointment.

LO 4 a) Ask your teacher to arrange for you to do that on the internal phone.

TIME OF APPOINTMENT ______________________________
(date) (time)

LO4 b) Tell one of your classmates what time your appointment is.

Consult the bus timetable to decide which bus you should take to be there in time.

Tell your teacher how you found the information and why you decided on that time.

LO3 a) Use the bus timetable to explain to your teacher which bus you will need to catch to get to your appointment on time.

MOUNTAIN VIEW BUSLINE

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

Acacia Ridge - Mountain View

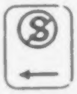
DEP	ARR
6.30am	7.00am
7.00am	7.30am
7.30am	8.00am

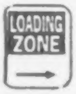
Thereafter buses depart on the hour until 4.30pm.

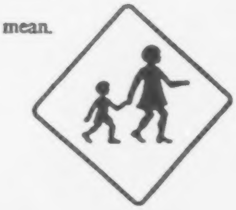
DEP	ARR
4.30pm	5.00pm
5.00pm	5.30pm
5.30pm	6.30pm

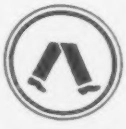
Thereafter buses depart on the hour until 10.00pm.

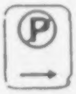
LO3 a) In or near the shopping centre, you will see some symbols. Explain what they mean.

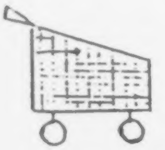












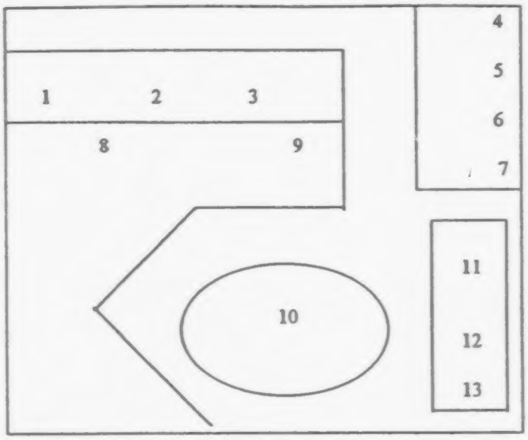
Assessment Tasks

MODULE: LIT 111

LO3a)

Terrific! You got the job. Here is a map of the shopping centre and Sam's Snackbar is in the Eatery.

Referring to the key, show your teacher around the shopping centre.



KEY TO SHOPS

1 Sarah's Beauty Salon
2 Style Ladies Fashions
3 Sports Goods
4 Computer Spot
5 Sparky's Electrics
6 Sam's Snack Bar
7 Fur, Feathers and Fins
8 Supermarket
9 Newsagents
10 Eatery
11 Toilets and Parents' Room
12 Centre Management
13 Cleaners
14 Car Park

LO3 a)

One of the things to do is to find out when the Snackbar is open.

Read the sign opposite and tell your teacher when the Snackbar is open.

Sam's
Snack Bar

OPEN
8 am - 6pm
Mon to Fri

8am - 2pm
Saturday

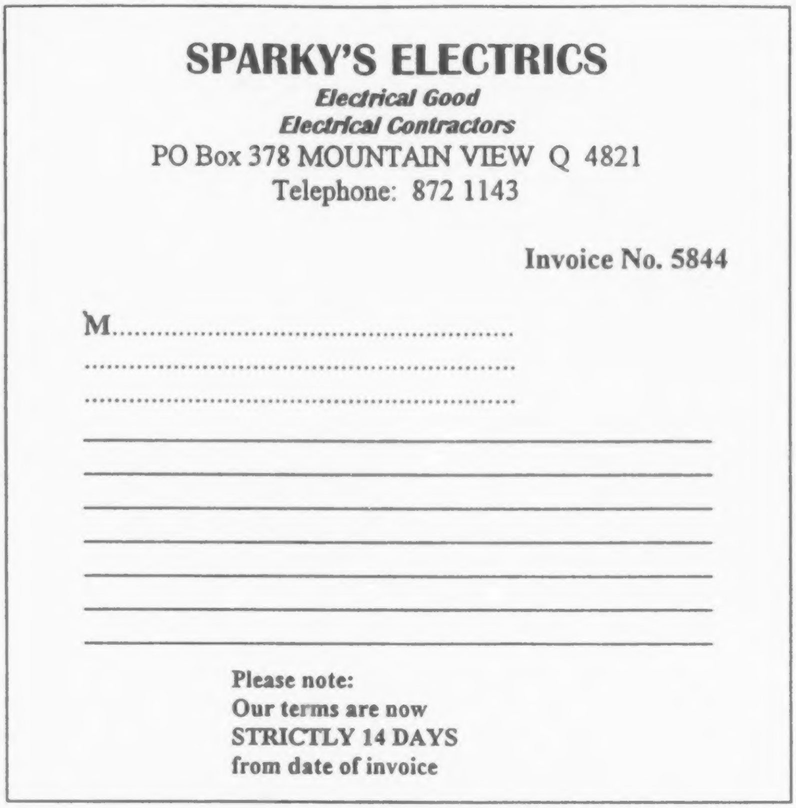
CLOSED
Sunday

Assessment Tasks

MODULE: LIT 111

LO1b)

You have had some electrical work done. What kind of a form is this? Explain it to your teacher.



SPARKY'S ELECTRICS

Electrical Good
Electrical Contractors
PO Box 378 MOUNTAIN VIEW Q 4821
Telephone: 872 1143

Invoice No. 5844

M...
....
....

Please note:
Our terms are now
STRICTLY 14 DAYS
from date of invoice

LO6

Select one of the machines or appliances listed below and demonstrate how to use it.

As you use it, explain two safety features you have read in the user's manual.

Explain how you make sense of difficult words or instructions in the user's manual.

The teacher will select three phrases or words from the manual. Explain what they mean.

Sandwich Maker
Calculator
Microwave
Photo Copier etc.

Assessment Criteria

MODULE: LIT 111

YELLOW BUTTERCAKE

CAKE MIX

1 PRE-HEAT: gas or electric oven 180° (350°F) or 160°C for a fan forced oven. Grease and flour cake pan or lightly grease non-stick pan.

2 PLACE
Cake Mix
1 egg
2/3c water
3 tabsp soft butter or margarine into a mixing bowl.

3 MIX
with a wooden spoon until ingredients are combined (approx 30 seconds).

4 BAKE
One 22cm x 11cm loaf pan 40-45 minutes ....
OR One 18cm sandwich pan 35-40 minutes ....
OR shallow patty pans [(Bake at 190° C (375°F)] 12-15 minutes.
Cake is baked if it springs back when lightly touched in the centre.
Allow cake to cool in pan 5-8 minutes before inverting onto a cake cooler.

LO5a) Tell your teacher, in your own words, how you would make this cake.

LO5a) Procedures for cleaning the floors. Arrange in the correct order.

Mop the whole floor area.

As each section of the floor dries, replace all furniture,
bins and boxes to their correct places.

Clear all moveable items from the floor (chairs, bins, boxes etc)

Fill a bucket with hot water and add one capful of Super Cleano.

Vacuum the floor one section at a time.

Assessment Items for CNL03 Module LIT112 Level 1B

The assesment items for this module address individual outcomes. Learning outcomes 2, 3, 5, and 6 require negotiation with students and use authentic texts and technologies to assess competence.

LO2- is an oral assessment and should be developed by the teacher in consultation with the student(s). See module planner chart for details.

LO3- requires the student to complete a written task using authentic texts with which the students are familiar.

LO5- requires the student to write a simple procedure and should be negotiated with individual students, see module planner.

LO6- requires the student to demonstrate, with oral description, how to use a piece of technology. See module planner for detail.

Emphasis should be on developing appropriate tasks in context which may vary from student to student.

LO No 1 LIT112

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE, DO NOT WRITE)

1. Position Desired

2. Full Name (BLOCK LETTERS) SURNAME

Mr ☐ (mark with
Mrs ☐ an X
Miss ☐ whichever
Ms ☐ applicable)

(Christian or Given Names) (Maiden Name or Change of Name)

3. Address

Telephone No. Home Business

4. Date of Birth Place of Birth

5. Citizenship: Australian Citizen Other (please specify)

6. Marital Status:

7. Next of Kin: Address:

8. **EDUCATION HISTORY**

(a)
SECONDARY EDUCATION: Highest level achieved or being attempted:

Name of Examination e.g. Year 10, 11, 12 (Matric) **Period of Attendance 19 to 19**

Study Record - List all subjects Attempted & Results	Subject	Result	Subject	Result
Name of School:				

(b)

POST SECONDARY Course of Study:

List all Subjects Attempted & Results	Subject	Result	Subject	Result	Subject

continued next page

9. **EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**(Including Part Time and Vacation Employment)

Period of Employment From To	Position	Name of Employer	Nature of Work	Reason for Leaving

10. HEALTH **Are you normally in good health? YES ☐ NO ☐ (Mark with an X where applicable)**
Heave you any physical disabilities/ If Yes, give details: ______________________________

11. OTHER QUALIFICATIONS **(List any further information related to your application including further study, sporting clubs, social or community interest and membership of clubs or societies, etc):**

____

____

____

12. MILITARY SERVICES: **Are you a former member of the Australian Forces? YES ☐ NO ☐**

13. OTHER INFORMATION **(List any further information related to your application including further study, sporting clubs, social or community interests and membership of clubs or societies, etc):**

____

____

____

____

I declare that the above information is true and correct.

DATE ____/____/____ ______________________________
(Signature of Applicant)

CNL03 LIT112 LO4

NAME __________________________ DATE ________________

TASK **Make a telephone call to arrange a service.**

Telephone the plumber to come and fix your blocked sink. Arrange a time and day. The plumbing company is called Inland Plumbing. They charge $55 per hour plus materials You should ask their hourly rates, and remember to give your address.

Plan your phone call with a partner's help:

	YOU	INLAND PLUMBING
Ring the number		
Give name		
State purpose		
Record the service details (e.g. times, dates & costs)		
Repeat to confirm		
Close		

CNL03 LIT112 LO4 [illegible]

CLASS ______________ **ASSESSMENT SHEET** DATE ____________

TASK **Make a telephone call to arrange a (plumbing) service.**

(√ or x)

STUDENT NAME	Opened & closed politely	Stated purpose clearly	Turn taking in oral interaction	Good vocabulary choices	Intelligible pronunciation, intonation	Confirmed details appropriately	L.O.4	
							J	M

LET'S START READING: THE FIELD TRIAL OF A COMPUTER PROGRAM AS AN AID IN ADULT LITERACY TEACHING

Maureen Mortimer

This chapter reports a study of reactions of students to a multimedia package I have been designing. It is also a record of individual progress and achievement as they used the package as part of their adult literacy tuition.

1. Reasons for the study

1.1 Client group

Whitsunday is a small college comprising two campuses, Bowen and Cannonvale, 65 kms apart. Both campuses have a similar problem, that of a largely itinerant population. Many of these people would prefer a more permanent lifestyle but lack the education and skills to hold down the type of job which would make this possible. The employment they manage to pickup is casual and mostly on a 'drop everything and be here within half an hour if you want the work' basis. This means that classes are often missed. The groups also have a wide variety of ability which makes teaching difficult. This is not unusual.

> It is already estimated that between 10 and 20 percent of our adult population in Australia require extra help to reach a state of functional Literacy. The spectrum of needs can range from being totally unable to read and write to those whose verbal skills are so eroded as to make communication very difficult. (Taylor & Thommassen 1991)

A need was seen for more individual activities to back up classroom work. This would mean that students would be able to still work on their own individual literacy programs and not be restricted to attending classes with a rigid timetable.

Two matters concerned me about the adult literacy students, one was a lack of motivation in some students often manifested in a lack of wanting to participate in class activities, and a related phenomenon, that of irregular attendance. These students lack self esteem and do not mix with other students in the college. I was interested to see if these behaviours could be changed.

1.2 Why use a Computer?

Interviews with the students and research into the potential job market revealed that it was not only lack of literacy skills which was a handicap to getting that elusive job, potential employers were looking favourably on those who had computer knowledge, however minimal that knowledge might be.

> The concept of useable knowledge is constantly changing and being replaced by other 'new technologies' and literacies associated with micro electronic technology.
>
> To get jobs in the new information based industries people must be able to interpret and manipulate the new symbols and icons that are displayed in the new technologies. (Kell 1995)

Computers are also widely in use in other courses being offered in the college. By extending the use of computers in adult literacy classes we were helping our students identity more with the other students in the college rather than thinking that they were the 'poor relations' or 'the dummies' as many have referred to themselves. It has been found that the use of computers has many advantages, including: student control over their own learning, they have active involvement and can vary the pace and content of their learning. The regular immediate feedback given by the computer is appreciated by students as is the constant record kept of their improvement and the sense of privacy as no-one else could see their mistakes. One important facet of the introduction of the computer with adult literacy students is the improvement in their self esteem as they overcome their fear of technology and really feel that they are learning a new marketable skill.

2. Designing the program

2.1 Points to consider in the design of the program

ARIS recently published a reproduced a set of guidelines on evaluating literacy and numeracy educational software.

> These guidelines were developed by a committee with representation from TAFE NSW (Foundation Studies Training Division, NSW Adult Migrant English Service, the Board of Adult and Community Education and the NSW State and public libraries. The committee was convened by the State Library of NSW) (ARIS, 1995)

The following is a summary and my interpretation of these guidelines in the context of my program.

2.1.1 Pedagogy

The program should: be clear in its objectives and follow the scaffolding and fading technique of strong support gradually leading to independent study. The student should be aware of the learning outcomes of the program which progresses from known simple material to unknown challenging tasks.

2.1.2 Content

This should be free of all stereotypes, it should also be fun to use. Appropriate audio should back up the visual components of the program. I wanted to avoid synthesised sound and to use real warm friendly voices.

2.1.3 View of Language

The words to be learned should be presented in context, preferably in a context which is meaningful to the students and appropriate to their daily lives.

2.1.4 View of Learners

The students are all mature adults, the program and material should not treat them as children. Many are computer illiterate but this should be overcome by instruction in a manner fitting to adults. Games are a good teaching medium but I was anxious that our students did not feel that they were being patronised.

2.1.5 Feedback

This should be immediate and whenever possible positive. When help was needed it should be in the form of a gentle reminder rather than a harsh instruction.

2.1.6 Ease of Use

Because many of the students were unfamiliar with computers it was important that the program be made as easy to use as possible. To this end keyboard skills were not necessary as all interaction would be done via the mouse. There would be a comprehensive introduction and backup material. Interaction methods should be consistent.

2.1.7 Flexibility

The program needed to be flexible enough for the student to enter at his or her perceived level and exit or return to the start or previous level whenever he or she wished. The response method would be kept consistent to aid the ease of operating the program.

2.1.8 Screen Layout

Text would be large, brightly coloured and in upper and lower case as in normal reading material. A variety of screen colours would be used with feedback messages and instructions in different colour combinations. Illustrations would be kept to simple line drawings to avoid cluttering up the screen. The typeface and illustrations would be reproduced in the backup material but in black and white as dictated by economy.

2.1.9 Technical requirements

It was important to remember in the design of the program that it would run smoothly on the library computers. Tests would have to be made frequently on these computers as the program itself was being designed on a much higher grade machine.

2.2 What was the program going to do?

One of the most successful activities in the reading classes has been that of Language Experience where the students' own experiences and conversation are used as a reading medium. Using this text in cloze exercises has resulted in the student being able to read whole passages of text. Gee and Freebody have written that it is not enough to read, a student should read something meaningful.

> You can no more cut the literacy out of the overall social practice or cut away the non literacy parts from the literacy parts that you can abstract the white squares from a chess board and still have a chess board (Gee 1992)
>
> Literacy practices are written into the fabric of our social life ... Adults learning literacy are not learning what school children learn, and that, far from being an odd poor cousin, adult literacy is in fact forced to be literacy at work, culturally, economically and ideologically. (Freebody 1992)

It was therefore decided to adapt the Language Experience approach and cloze exercises to a computer program using a multimedia authoring program. To make the program easier to manage it was decided to concentrate on the 'lower' end of ability, those students who were having the most difficulty in reading. It was also decided to use the students from one campus (Bowen) as 'guinea pigs'. The students at Cannonvale would be the control group.

2.3 What words would be 'taught'

The Language Experience approach had shown that what would appear to be the more difficult words such as 'cabbages', bananas', 'elephants' or 'screwdrivers' were not the ones with which the students had the majority of problems. This is probably because they are usually identified with picture clues in reading material or by labels on the actual objects themselves. Difficulties occurred with the more common words such as 'when' 'where' 'about' or 'their'. The resource Working on Reading, a practical approach to the teaching of reading' contained a list of the 100 most common words in English which included most of the words which were proving difficult. This was decided to be used as a starting point, more could be added later as was deemed necessary, using words identified by the students.

2.4 What text would be used?

It was decided to use material which meant something to the students. other computer packages have been found to be lacking in that they are too juvenile for adults or have material relating to North American or European lifestyles. Material reflecting tropical Queensland life and activities would be ideal. Class discussions with groups of students resulted in a series of story lines, each comprising a number of simple sentences. Each sentence contained some of the list of 100 words. These stories were relevant to the lifestyles and the spoken English of the client group, they also felt that they had ownership of the program. The sentences and storylines were graded to become progressively harder.

2.5 Production details

I undertook to design the package, illustrations were commissioned, some by the students themselves and some from a local artist, and sound using real articulate Australian voices was arranged. Students were eager to be involved in this part of the program, usually shy people were volunteering to have their voices recorded by the sound studio on the computer. It was also a good learning experience as they were fascinated by the new technology of the colour scanner and programs such as CorelDRAW, Authorware Professional and Animator Pro. The project was having the effect of really making the students lose their fear of computers.

3. Description of the Program

The program is based on the stories and sentences composed from the life experiences of all students although one group was involved more than the others as they were full-time students at the college. Each sentence contains at least three words from the list of 100 most common words in English referred to previously. The program contains a number of 'stories' or levels, each story is composed of a number of sentences. The tasks get progressively harder as the levels increase.

At the start of the program there is a brief video sequence explaining how to use the program: including the use of the mouse, how to exit or return to the start or another level, selection of lessons and the advice to call a teacher or tutor if they felt that they needed help.

All other interactions with the student appear in print form accompanied by a voice over, actions are controlled by the student using the mouse.

The first screen asks the student to determine the speed of the program.

The next screen asks the student to select the story or level required.

The student is then asked to select a 'lesson' or sentence.

At any time the student can quit, restart the program or go back one screen by using the mouse.

The lesson starts with a blank coloured screen, each key word then appears separately in a contrasting colour on the screen along with a voice over saying the word.

These words disappear and the lesson sentence appears in a different colour from the key words along with a line drawing illustration and a voice over reading the sentence. The sentence disappears leaving the line drawing.

The sentence reappears with the key word to be learned in a different colour. This colour is the same as that of the key words shown previously. The voice over reads the sentence stressing the key word.

The key word then disappears leaving a blank space.

The key words then reappear in the same colour as before accompanied by a voice over.

The student can use the mouse to click on the missing word and drag it into the sentence.

If the wrong word is chosen the word will not be accepted into the sentence and the student urged to try again.

The correct word will be accepted with positive feedback praising the student.

All of these instructions are in print accompanied by voice overs.

This sequence is repeated with different words in the sentence.

At the end of each lesson or sentence a summary screen appears giving information on: key words learned, words which were correct first time and words which required more attempts.

The screen now returns to the lesson choice screen where the student can choose to retry the lesson or choose another sentence. Each lesson is accompanied by a different line drawing and a different colour combination of screen background, sentence print, key word print and instruction type print.

The program was packaged and transferred to a number of computers so that more than one student could work on it at the same time

To back up the program, print material was made of the lessons and each participating student was given a copy of this print material. This was composed of a booklet for each level or story containing a list of the key words, the same illustrations, the sentence written out in full on one page and the illustration and the sentence with the missing word on the next page. They were asked to write in the words in the spaces provided. Teachers could be approached to help if needed, but no specific teaching was given for the completion of this book, although time was allowed for the work during regular lessons.

4. Trial of the program

4.1 Pretesting

In order to see if the program was having any effect some form of testing was necessary. This was explained to the students and they were given the option not to take part in the test or the trial as they wished. All volunteered to be part of the program.

The students were all given a test of word recognition of the 100 most common words. This was done by first giving them the words in sentences and then asking them to read a word list where the key words were on their own. They then did a cloze exercise on the words. No time limit for completion of the test was set and no help was given. It is my concern that this testing was artificial and related to Gee's observation:

> ... reading is what reading tests test ... (Gee 1992)

However, it did give me a starting point and a point of reference on which to base my research. None of the students objected to the testing, even those who had had no part in the design of the program.

4.2 Students involved

Thirty students enrolled in basic literacy courses were asked if they would be part of this research.

Three groups were involved, a daytime Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, these were the ones who were involved in the design of the program, an evening community class and a daytime tutorial class.

4.2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Group

This group scored the best overall on the pretest, this could be because they were already familiar with the material. Scores for this group averaged at 85% accurate.

4.2.2 Evening Community Group

The evening community class is of very mixed ability. Some had little difficulty with the words, others found them very difficult. Although the average score was 75% two students scored 100% and one third of the class scored less than 50%. One third of the tests were presented incomplete.

4.2.3 Daytime Tutorial Class

The daytime tutorial class has the most number of low level students. Three of them are Endeavour Foundation referrals who had great difficulty with the word recognition. However great pains were taken to ensure that they did not think that they were failing anything. This class scored an average of 40%, over half the tests were presented incomplete.

4.2.4 Cannonvale Control groups

These students are similar to the Bowen evening community class, a very mixed range of ability. Most are casual workers in the Hospitality Industry. They were given the words to read and to write down just the same as the Bowen group but were not told of the program at this stage. They just accepted it as a class exercise. This class scored an average of 70%. One third of the tests were returned incomplete.

At the end of the pretest period the students were quite happy to commence working on the computer.

4.3 Actual trial

Each student was instructed individually on how to use the program. The time to do this varied greatly. Some were already fairly computer literate, especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, some had never touched a computer in their lives. All were enthusiastic and eager to take part in the program. They were then allocated time within their regular lessons to use the program and also informed that they could come and use the computer at other times during the day or even at specified times in the evening. It was not necessary for a teacher or tutor to be present when they were actually using the computer. However, in order for me to keep accurate records they should sign in and sign out of a log book so I could assess the time spent on the computer.

Students were asked to give feedback on as many aspects as they could think of. They were told that any comment they made would be valued, even if they thought that the point was trivial. They were also told that they would be given a checklist at the end of the trial period.

The time for the trial was set for four weeks.

4.4 Observations of students

Students all tried the program out in the lessons. After the first lesson the time on the computer was made optional and if they wished other work could be set for them.

4.4.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Group

This group all competed the entire program and also the printed material. Most of the work was done in lesson time although two of the students became so fascinated that they returned in the evenings. One student brought in her husband and children so they could see what she was doing. All the family used the program treating it as a computer game. One student monopolised a computer every lunchtime until he had finished the program. He told me later that he was treating it as a personal challenge. Only one student had problems with the material, tutorial help was given to this student. None of these students had any problems with the operation of the computer or the program.

4.4.2 Evening Community class

Two students decided that this was not for them as it was 'too easy' and so preferred to continue with their regular work. These were the ones who had scored 100% on the pretest. Of the others, the majority could cope with the content but all needed help with the computer operation. One student came in on another night during the week to use the program. Only half of this group finished the program and less than this number finished the workbook in the trial period. They did, however, express a desire to continue to work on this material after the trial period Three students in this group found the combination of learning a computer and also doing literacy work too much and did not continue with the program although they continued to attend class.

4.4.3 Daytime Tutorial Class

This group accepted the program with enthusiasm. They all spent as much time as possible on the computers, one person attended college on two days other than his tutorial days to use the program. Although each person was only required to attend class for one hour, in practice half of the students were spending all afternoon in the college working on the program or the workbook. Even with this amount of contact time at the end of the period only one person had completed all the program and none of the students had completed the workbook, but all were continuing with the project. Of this group most people needed quite a lot of help initially with the computers but once they got the idea they coped very well and most were able to work at their own pace without any tutor help. Two people still required tutor assistance all the time and this was given.

5. After the trial

After the four week period the students were given a repeat of the pretest and also a checklist checklist to complete.

5.1 Results of the post test

As with the pretest no publication was made of scores but all the students knew their own original score and were eager to see if they had improved. No time limit was set for completion of the test, and no help was given.

5.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Group

The average score for this group rose to 98%, the majority of the group scored 100% on all parts of the test. The 'wrong' answers originated from confusion over 'there' and 'their' or 'to' and 'too'.

5.1.2 Evening Community Class

The average score remained at 75%. This, however, was a general improvement as the two who had scored 100% in the pretest did not take part in the post test. More tests were returned complete than in the time of the pretest.

5.1.3 Daytime Tutorial Class

This group had by far the greatest increase in scores, rising to an overall 75% accuracy. This probably relates to the fact that only two out of eight tests were returned incomplete.

5.1.4 Cannonvale control group

The average score increased to 80% with slightly more papers returned complete.

5.2 Feedback from Checklist

The checklist was designed to be as user friendly as possible and did not require the student to do any writing unless he or she wished. Students were asked a question and then asked to circle a response from a choice of between three and five options. Help was given to complete this questionnaire if needed. Twenty five students completed the checklist. Only Bowen students were given the checklist to complete.

5.2.1 Difficulty of Computer program

The choice was 'too hard' 'fairly hard' 'OK' and 'easy'.

Too hard	5
Fairly hard	5
OK	9
Easy	6

5.2.2 Difficulty of material

The same choices were given.

Too hard	5
Fairly hard	3
OK	7
Easy	10

5.2.3 Appropriateness of Material

The choices were, 'meant something to me' or 'meant little to me' or 'meant nothing to me'.

Meant something to me	15
Meant little to me	10
Meant nothing to me	0

5.2.4 What was learned

Did you learn, 'a lot, 'a little bit' 'nothing'

A lot	10
A little bit	15
Nothing	0

5.2.5 Feedback from computer

Students could chose as many of these words as they wished.

Helpful	15
Not helpful	8
Friendly	8
Unfriendly	5
Rude	0
Annoying	5
Welcome	6

5.3 Verbal Response to Teacher

Each student was interviewed and asked their comments on the program. I was interested to know their suggestions on how the program could be improved and what changes I should make. In the course of the interviews the following emerged as the most common suggestions for improvement.

5.3.1 Speed

Although students were invited to adjust the speed of the program at the start they were only given three choices: slow, average or fast. Two students thought that 'slow' was not slow enough and would have liked the ability to halt the program for periods while they consulted the workbook. The majority thought that once they had become familiar with the program that 'fast' was not fast enough. It was recommended that at least two other speed levels should be introduced and that they be given numerical labels rather than the words 'slow' or 'fast', especially 'slow' which was thought to be demeaning.

5.3.2 Pretesting function on computer

Some students would have liked the ability to test themselves on the key words of a lesson before attempting the lesson. They could then choose either to skip this lesson or use the pretest as a self evaluation tool when it was compared with the post lesson summary.

5.3.3 Limitation of tries

The program allows the student to keep trying indefinitely and will not leave the current task until the correct word has been identified. Students would have liked a limit of two tries to be imposed This would cut down the incidence of guesswork or of trying all the words in turn as you were sure to get the correct one by a process of elimination. It would also speed up the program.

5.3.4 Colour

Some students felt bedazzled (their word) by the use of colour. The program has a different colour combination for each lesson and they would have liked to see this cut down to three or four combinations in total. They felt that they would then be able to concentrate harder on the program. The use of red was to be discouraged as this was identified as being hard to pick out from a brightly coloured screen for some students. The line drawings for illustrations had originally been shown on a white background. This was changed to make the background the same colour as he screen. The students found this change easier on the eye.

5.3.5 Feedback

The feedback, although generally considered helpful and friendly, was thought to be boring and predictable. More variation was needed in the wording of the feedback. Strong support was voiced for the ability to print out the lists of words and the results screens at the end of each lesson.

5.3.6 Voice overs

A variety of voices had been used in the program. It was remarked that all the voices were warm, friendly and non threatening. Students, however, felt that we should stick to one voice and unanimously chose the clear tones and slow delivery of one of the library staff at the college.

5.3.7 Content

Students would like to continue with the program but would like the words and stories changed. What they really want is for a personalised program for each student. At the present time this is impossible because of the time it takes to write the programs, but extra stories and key words can be incorporated into the existing program.

5.3.8 Accessibility

Sometimes students had difficulty in accessing the program because all the computers were in use. It was recommended that we put the program on to more computers. Some students would have liked to put the program on to floppy disks so they could take their work home. This is possible if the space intensive voice overs are deleted and will be done.

6. Behaviour changes

As was mentioned at the start of this report I was interested to see if the introduction of the computer program had any effect on the motivation and irregular attendance of the students. There were some changes but it would be impossible for me to say whether these changes were the result of the program or merely a Hawthorne effect, although students were not aware that I was considering these factors as part of the trial.

6.1 Attendance

Records of rolls kept before and during the trial show that attendance improved during the trial for all groups. This was most noticeable in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group who went from an average of 80% attendance for the four weeks before the trial to 95% during the trial. There can be no record of attendance after the trial as the students are now on holiday.

6.2 Motivation

A log kept by students of computer use showed that some were coming in to college in their own time to work on the program. Certainly the computers were in full use each lunchtime. The afternoon tutorial group were arriving earlier and staying longer than their allocated time so they could use the computer. Some feedback I have received from the students indicates that the program needed to be put on to other computers to meet demand for its use. Observations of students showed that they appeared more enthusiastic, they asked lots of questions and generally showed an interest in the program.

> Some programs do provide desirable outcomes such as: independent, selfpaced learning, individual authoring of material, student interaction and improved editing and legibility. The status and interest attached to computers may also enhance the motivation to learn.

(Taylor & Thommassen 1991)

6.3 Self Esteem

Observations of students have shown a rise in self esteem and also a rise in their status in the eyes of other students. Students on other courses were interested in what the literacy students were doing on computer and often engaged with them in conversation about the trial. The students who had had a major part in the designing of the package were eager to discuss their activities. This was a breakthrough as previously the literacy groups had tended not to integrate with the other students. Some of the students engaged on the trial have asked me about careers in computing and have set themselves career goals in this area.

7. Reflections

Computers are now a way of life and if you do not know anything about them you are way behind in the social stakes. The cartoon Doonsbury featured on December 23 1995 in 'The Australian' illustrates this point when a seven year old child tells her father that she cannot hold up her head at school if her Christmas present computer is merely a Pentium 60 when her friends have machines with a capacity of over 100. To meet the demands of an increasing computer literate society we should be using this technology increasingly in our teaching strategies.

> Courses will need to incorporate technology in course design and delivery mode. Teachers will need to demonstrate awareness and willingness to apply principles of literacy and language in these technologies which are fundamental to open learning interactive multimedia, world wide web and Internet computer networks. (Kell 1995)

Computers are also evolving rapidly and changing many of our preconceived ideas, threatening to bring even more drastic changes to our lifestyles.

> The rapid acceleration of technology also means that old methods of reading and learning will be replaced by new forms of reading and learning. (Kell 1995)

My computer program sought to introduce computer technology into the teaching of basic key word recognition. The program was not perfect and students have given me many suggestions for improvement which will be incorporated where possible. However, the students did improve their word recognition, they also developed more active motivation. Their status in the college grew with their own increased self esteem and confidence.

This is only the start.

Maureen Mortimer
Whitsunday College Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE

People I need to thank
Staff and students of Whitsunday College Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE
Staff of the Open Learning Institute, Brisbane
Staff of the CD Rom Bureau, Brisbane

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARIS. (1995) *Guidelines: Evaluating Software*, ARIS Bulletin,Volume 6 Number 3, p.9.

'Doonsbury'. (1995) *The Australian Newspaper*, December 23.

Freebody, P. (1992) Critical Literacy, Reflections on International Literacy, *Write On*.

Gee, J. (1992) *What is Reading? Literacies, Discourses and Domination*. Mass., Literacies Institute.

Kell, P. (1995) *A Survival Guide for Adult Educators in Australian Literacy Policy* Research into Practice Series Number 2 NLLIA Adult Literacy Research Network (QLD).

Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL). (1993) *Working on Reading A practical approach to the teaching of reading.*, QCAL Collection of Tutor Resources.

Taylor, M. & Thommassen, D. (1991) *First Byte: A Study of Computer Software for Literacy Needs*, SPELD QLD Inc.

WHO'S LEARNING FROM WHOM: A NEW TEACHER EXPLORES LITERACY ASSESSMENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES IN AN ADULT URBAN CLASSROOM

Cherie de Pinna

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a report of a study of literacy teaching/learning and assessment practices in a classroom of adult urban students. The project developed from ideas generated at assessment forums coordinated by Dr Joy Cumming for the National Language & Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA). It was undertaken in conjunction with Ms Jean Searle, Lecturer in Adult Education at Griffith University. Mr Alex Gamblin, Director, Southbank Institute of TAFE and Ms Trisha Evans, Associate Director of the Indigenous Peoples' (Aust.) Unit supported this research project being conducted at Southbank TAFE's Kangaroo Point campus.

The project funding in part enabled me to travel to the Northern Territory to meet and talk with educators in Darwin and Batchelor. The generosity of these people is acknowledged. Ms Maree Klesch, Ms Helen Clarke, and in particular, Ms Pat Beattie from Batchelor College gave generously of their time and experience to advise me on assessment, teaching strategies and text deconstruction. Ms Lenore Dembski and all the staff at the Northern Territory Department of Education's Aboriginal Development Unit (ADU) deserve special mention for their hospitality and generosity. In particular, Ms Lenore Dembski, Mr Brian (BJ.) McGinness, Ms Lee Clark, Mr Kevin Parriman and Ms Barbara Smith took time to explain the training programs they are coordinating with Aboriginal communities in rural and remote areas of the Northern Territory. Ms Rae Flanigan from the Faculty of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies (FATSIS) at the Northern Territory University highlighted the importance of cultural identity in teaching.

This chapter comprises extracts from and information based on extensive notes taken throughout the semester, a contribution from some of the students, and the verbatim responses to questions posed by the author, about class activities.

BACKGROUND

The Access program at the Indigenous Peoples' (Aust.) Unit (IPU) at Southbank Institute of TAFE comprises three levels - CN0016 Certificate in Basic Vocational & Educational Access

(ATSI), CN0017 Certificate in Intermediate Vocational & Educational Access (ATSI) and CN0018 Certificate in Advanced Vocational & Educational Access (ATSI). Students study literacy, numeracy, cultural studies and computers.

My appointment at the IPU was on a casual basis. In first semester, I was a tutor with the Intermediate and Basic Literacy classes, but in second semester I was promoted to being the teacher of the new intake of Intermediate Literacy students. The classes were held for a total of six hours per week, divided into two three-hour sessions on the one day. This situation was due to my own time restrictions.

Nearly all the students in the class had negative school experiences and were returning to education after periods away from school.

The class comprised 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from various parts of Australia, but mostly from Queensland and New South Wales. Ages ranged from 15 to 50+ years. Many of the mature-aged students were looking to change vocation and enter fields such as welfare, administration, and the police force. Some were wanting to go on to university. The students were part of the mid-year intake, so had to go into either Basic or Intermediate levels due to administrative constraints. Many could have entered Advanced level, if this had been open to them.

The curriculum modules used were LIT113 Literacy and Language Personal Focus - Level 2 (1994), and LIT123 Literacy and Language Vocational Focus - Level 2 (1994). These are part of the Certificate in Vocational Access (CNL03).

I was advised that twelve learning outcomes had to be achieved by the end of semester, based on the tables set out in the Content section of the two Module Descriptors. Each table has six headings - factual, persuasive, transactional, procedural, narrative and conversation - under which are listed several examples of each text type. My understanding was that I was restricted to these examples, which I found very limiting and frustrating. I wanted to take a broader view of lesson planning - a large semester-long project, for example, where literacy activities were carried out in context - but what I was presented with, together with my own inhibitions as a new teacher, stifled this inclination at times. I did not want to have lessons where texts were taught on a weekly basis, in isolation from their context, but this seemed to be what was requested of me. Largely I ignored this and followed my intuition, but there were times when I lacked confidence and wondered if I was teaching the "right" way.

I also could not make sense of the Module Descriptors. The Learning Outcomes seemed vague, yet the Assessment Criteria referred specifically to only one text example in the Content table. It was only towards the end of the semester that I understood the flexibility offered in these Learning Outcomes.

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING INTERACTIONS

The word 'teacher' is in my view a misnomer with know-all connotations. I wanted to test my belief that no one person has the monopoly on knowledge and that everyone is a teacher and a learner, engaged in the process of swapping knowledge. I was curious to find out if students learn best when they are confident that their teacher respects them, and values the experience and skills they bring to the classroom (Shore et al., 1993)

I was also interested to test my theory that constructive feedback, rather than summative assessment is conducive to learning and a positive learner image. Students who have had negative school experiences need the encouragement of non-threatening assessment while they build up their motivation and confidence in their abilities (Wilson, 1995).

My belief that students respond better to criterion rather than norm-referenced assessment, and that their commitment and involvement deepens as they take on more responsibility for their learning needed to be examined. I also felt that norm-referenced assessment, with its competitive nature, did not foster the cohesion and team spirit that I was hoping to achieve in the classroom. Also, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples place importance on cooperative and collaborative learning, and although this would not apply to all students, it seemed appropriate in this instance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The major focus of the study was to be an account of my exploration of assessment activities in the integrated learner-focused classroom that I envisaged. Approval was sought from TAFE and the IPU management to carry out the research during second semester, 1995. The students were informed of my research project and grant, but it was not until the end of the semester that I asked for their feedback. This was because as my research progressed and revealed other issues, I was unsure at times, just what the most important aspect of my research would be. I wanted to be absolutely clear in my mind what I wanted to ask the students before I approached them. If I was not clear, I felt that my research would appear an intrusion rather than something we could work on together. When we did discuss it, we decided that the students would contribute a section about a particular class activity, and that we would hold an informal feedback/evaluation session about the course (see Appendix 1).

It has been my practice since I started teaching to write detailed notes about the lesson and each student's progress after every class. These notes include facts, observations, "... ideas, insights and feelings" (Searle 1991). I do this in order to crystallise thoughts, clarify points and plan the next lesson.
Collecting data for the study, therefore, was an extension of this practice. My notes comprised detailed note-taking about each student and the class, plus three columns outlining what I had planned, what had/had not worked, and why.

I also read extensively about Aboriginal education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, held informal discussions with Aboriginal and Islander colleagues, friends and students and absorbed everything I was learning from the students and others around me (Spradley, 1979). Christie, Walton and Eggington, Harvey and McGinty, Petman and Dixon were some of the authors and editors who informed my thinking (Shore, 1991) but in particular, it was the students and the class tutor from whom I learnt the most.

At the end of the semester, the students and I held an informal feedback session based on questions compiled by me. The questions dealt mainly with assessment and teaching strategies, though we did discuss other activities that had occurred during the semester. Verbatim answers were recorded in shorthand by me. Time constraints and student absences on this particular afternoon, meant that only ten of the sixteen students who normally attended participated in the discussion. This was not altogether a negative situation, as more than half of those present were normally more reserved students, who willingly expressed their opinions.

Analysis of the data proved the most troublesome part of the research. I was frustrated by the amount of data I had collected, and felt lost as to where to start (Searle 1991). After seeking advice, I sorted the data according to assessment and teaching strategies that did or did not work. The report was then written as a narrative.

REFLECTIONS ON THE COURSE

When I found out that I was to have a class of my own I decided I wanted to develop a close, secure environment, which was conducive to learning. I envisaged a culture operating within the classroom, in which students felt responsible for and committed to their learning. A key part of my role, I believed, was to make the classroom as interesting a place as possible, so students would want to come - a contrast to their school experiences.

I wanted the students to feel confident about their ability to carry out the skills they learnt, and I felt this could only be achieved in a supportive atmosphere. I also wanted the students to change their perceptions of learning. I hoped that they would discover its joy, and see themselves as learners whose opinions are sought and respected.

ASSESSMENT METHOD

It is commonly accepted that good assessment practice is criterion rather than norm-referenced. I felt it was necessary also for me to relinquish the power that teachers have to stand in judgement of students' work (Shore et al., 1993). I wanted this power to be handed over to the students as much as possible, so as to build on their confidence and image as learners. It was just as important to involve the students in the assessment procedure as it was any other part of their learning (Osmond, 1990).

The criteria for the learning outcomes was decided collaboratively, with significant contributions by people who had experience in the text styles or activities (e.g. meeting procedure) we were studying. As students had more experience than I in some areas, it seemed logical that this knowledge should be tapped.

Text styles were modelled and scaffolded, always with student participation. Depending on the level of difficulty, the students then either worked in groups or attempted the task independently straightaway. All work, including the modelling and scaffolding, was written into their journals. Both verbal and written learning outcomes were assessed against the criteria upon which we, as a class, had decided. Assessment of text styles usually took the form of my constructive comments written in the journals, which were collected at the end of the lesson, then returned the following week. These journals had been distributed at the beginning of the semester. Verbal tasks, such as speaking in public, were peer-assessed.

Summative assessment was not used at all. In my view, tests and grading are detrimental to people who see themselves as poor learners. This assessment method has its place, but only when students are more self-assured about their abilities.

EXTRACTS FROM CLASS NOTES

The following extracts taken from my notes highlight issues that I felt were important in my development as a teacher and the learning of the students.

31 July 1995
On this day, about 10 new students joined the class. In fact, it was not until the third week

that the numbers stabilised and I knew for sure who would be in the class. This created some difficulties, as the beginning group had worked out rules and negotiated some learning outcomes. It also meant that I was constantly introducing class members to new people, but eventually we decided to dispense with this, and the students would say their names themselves. On the third week 24 students were in the class, though this was to reduce to a steady group of 13-16 for the rest of the semester.

When each new member arrived I would ask them, informally, about their personal goals and ambitions as I wanted to establish a rapport quickly. It was important that they knew I was interested in them as individuals. In this third week, having expressed their career goals, we decided on the learning outcomes outlined in the modules that would most benefit them in the future. Some of the late arrivals had already completed some of the outcomes with the Basic level teacher, so they were able to catch up easily.

The learning outcome we worked on at this stage was meeting procedure from Learning Outcome 2 which states, "Use literacy and language texts related to participation, discussion and decision making with class groups, e.g. read and act on minutes of meetings, take personal notes, negotiation, rules" from the Vocational Focus module.

I explained to the students that it seemed pointless to have a meeting without a purpose, so we decided to do it within a context. We discussed various topics, but when someone suggested fund-raising for an end-of-year party, we all agreed. We then debated what our first venture would be, and after listing about 10 suggestions on the board (ranging from stalls to basketball competitions) we decided on a raffle - a meat raffle. During this lesson, we elected a chairperson, secretary, vice-chair and treasurer for future meetings (though this was later to change to turn-about). About three students had extensive experience on Aboriginal community boards and committees, so I encouraged them to speak and share their knowledge, which they were happy to do.

At this class, journals were also distributed. When I was tutoring last semester, I had noticed that students were forever asking for distributed notes because they had either lost them or missed the class. The teacher kept having to use her morning teas and class time for re-photocopying material she had distributed the week or two before. I was determined not to do this, so gained approval from the IPU to purchase 25 exercise books (which were on special at 49c each) for students to use as their literacy journals. All the students had to bring every Monday was this exercise book and a pencil, and they would have everything they needed. I wanted to simplify things, to give them the best opportunity to be organised, so as to build on their self-image as learners.

Someone suggested that as we had an exercise book left over, we use it as a minutes book for our meetings, which we agreed was a great idea.

28 August 1995
The class began with organising the raffle. Students divided the raffle tickets into books of 10, while others put the agenda together for the morning's meeting. It was on this day that the meeting began to take on the role of an information forum, with students suggesting items other than fund-raising. Some of the items for discussion were tutors, culture studies trip etc. I felt this was a great step forward, as the students took on the responsibility of the meeting. Developments in student interaction and group trust emerged during this class. In order to analyse the text, we moved the desks together, so we could all sit around a table.

In this lesson, I attempted text deconstruction based on Pat Beattie's "Teaching Notes from the Special Teaching Unit - No 3. Deconstructing a print text with students" published through

Batchelor College. Inexperience and lack of confidence meant that I failed to encourage the students to "dig deeper" (Beattie, 1995) into the text and critically analyse it. However, though we remained at a superficial level regarding text deconstruction, we worked on connecting words, which was a problem area for some of the students.

In the afternoon, we looked at note-taking from texts and practised looking up tables of contents, indexes etc. We then went to the library for library search tuition and to put what we had learnt in the classroom into practice.

9 October, 1995
Over the weeks, indications of students taking control of their learning emerged. One of these indicators was the desk arrangements. Every lesson, when I arrived, I found the desks already arranged in a U-shape, ready for the meeting. This day was no exception.

During the week, I had decided that, in light of earlier classes, the students needed to learn how to write a letter of complaint that provided constructive feedback. I explained why I thought this was important. Together, we scaffolded a letter on the board. Students offered suggestions for changing it and making it more succinct. We considered, wrote and erased, considered, wrote and erased. I explained that by doing this we were experiencing the writing process, in that we were polishing our work as authors do. Everyone was very happy with our finished product, and they said that they would appreciate receiving a letter like the one we'd written. They felt it was constructive and positive, while relaying a sincere message. One student said it showed the writer was assertive. This was a good lesson.

The students then wrote a letter of their own on a topic of their choice. Some were fluent, concise and well-considered letters about issues such as pollution, French nuclear testing and wheel chair access in Brisbane's Queen Street mall. Two students wrote about themselves - what they had been like and how they could improve. We read these out to each other.
One of the students raised some concerns about completing all the learning outcomes in time for graduation. I saw this as an opportunity to discuss learning outcomes in broader terms, in the hope that students would see learning as more than fulfilling the competency criteria set for particular tasks.

ASSESSMENT

The following extracts detail specific assessment activities which took place during the semester and the reactions of the students and myself to their implementation.

18 August 1995
I assessed the students' resumes and wrote copious notes on their work. At this time, I read "Collaborative revision: learning and self-assessment" by Michael C Flanigan who argues that students do not absorb the notes written by teachers on their assignments, because they are not involved in the assessment process. When I thought back on my own experience, this made sense to me, so I rubbed everything out and started again. Instead, I gave hints so the students would have to find the mistakes. For example, the notes read, "Campbell, This is a neat and concise resume, however there are two typing errors on page 1 and three on page 2. When you've corrected them, please give me a copy of the resume' for my files. Thanks, Cherie". This way, I hoped that students would discover their grammatical and spelling mistakes and be motivated to correct them.

I imagined students, inspired and enthused by my notes, analysing their work, then poring over books eager to find the answers to the posed questions. Instead, I found it was some time before the corrected resumes came back to me - if, indeed, they did at all. I couldn't work out why this had happened until I spoke to another literacy teacher. She explained that as well as giving hints I should have helped the students identify how to correct their work. How would a poor speller, for example, be able to identify a spelling mistake? This had crossed my mind, but I had dismissed it. It was up to me to discuss possible solutions with the student.

4 September 1995 (extract)

The fact that we had organised a raffle provided an ideal opportunity to introduce report writing and thereby write about the raffle.

> ... After a short discussion and explanation about report layouts, and scaffolding brief sentence examples, I asked the students to brainstorm in small groups then write individual reports. Everyone was unsure as to what to do, as my request was met with blank stares and confused looks. What was the problem? Had I been unclear in my explanation? After talking together, I realised I had to scaffold in more detail. We analysed and thought back on what we had done to organise the raffle, then wrote some of this information, in full sentences on the board. The sentence examples provided a basis for everyone to get started, and once this was worked out, they sat down together and wrote reports. The quality of the reports reflected the importance of thorough scaffolding. They were cohesive and well-structured, displayed a concise and clear interpretation of events, and were informative and sequential in their approach.
>
> Later, we read out some of the reports, and discussed the problems or otherwise of writing them. I realised that students have an unrealistic expectation of writing they think they should be able to sit down and write perfectly and that it should just flow from the pen. I explained that no writer does this and that writing, even for professionals, is very hard.

9 October, 1995 (extract)

> One of the students asked about completion of learning outcomes. This question provided an opportunity to broaden students' perceptions of learning outcomes from that of a narrowly defined task. After lunch, the class tutor and I devised a question for the class to consider. We wrote on the board - "Are the learning outcomes all the requirements you need to get a job, hold down a job and to operate effectively in both societies?"
>
> The students are fully aware of the need to have other skills and qualities in order to gain and remain in employment, and they know what these skills are. Some of the suggestions they made were: self-respect and respect for others, self-esteem, positive attitude, punctuality, hygiene, attendance, dress, good manners. The topic expanded to a discussion on self-abuse, the effect this has on one's work and personal life, and steps one can take to counter it. Self-evaluation, choice of friends and a change in attitude were some of the points raised.
>
> The tutor and I then asked the students to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 against the criteria they had suggested. We asked them to be honest with themselves in their assessment. We then included the activity, "speaking in front of a group" in this session and asked for them to say their scores and why. It was interesting to note that most people tended to be modest in their estimations. The tutor and I thought this session went really well, although later I was told that a couple of the boys had thought 'I was trying to get them to "open up" to me'.

DISCUSSION

My aim at the beginning of the course was to develop a strong, supportive and close unit so students would want to attend class, and feel motivated to learn. This was largely achieved, but it would not have been possible without the shared philosophy and aims of the class tutor, nor of the class members themselves.

The journals proved a successful tool in assisting both myself and the students to assess their Learning Outcome competencies. As all the work done during the lessons was written in their exercise books, they had portfolios to which they could refer and see their progress.

I have left it up to the students to say what they thought of the class (see Appendix). I have categorised what I learnt into two sections -professional and personal.

Professional

From the outset, I respected the experiences and knowledge each student brought to the class, and became part of the team, as student, coordinator and guide. It is comforting, therefore, to know that my humanist/radical educational philosophy is put into practice. The students and I shared information, and benefited from each other's knowledge. Honesty and openness were an integral part of this.

Decision-making and power was devolved as much as possible (Watson et al., 1981) although I always felt restricted by my inexperience. I was frustrated by my lack of knowledge as to how to hand over the power to the extent to which I wanted. If we had worked together for another semester, I would have been more confident and expanded the devolution to include, amongst other things, more student involvement in assessment.

This method of inclusive teaching is not popular with everyone, particularly with adults returning to education. Although I did not receive any complaints, I did hear that some of the older students would have preferred for me to have had a more conventional "chalk and talk" teaching style.

I was also confronted by less attractive aspects of my teaching. For example, I noticed that, despite handing over the power to the students, I would try to take over or direct the situation when I thought they were not making decisions quickly enough. I also had to watch constantly that I did not talk all the time. I would pose a question, then want to answer it, rather than wait and listen to forthcoming answers. I decided that I am afflicted with the "love to hear my own voice" syndrome, as it took all my will and self-control not to keep talking.

My explanations are not always clear. I tend to be too wordy, and start a sentence too often, rather than thinking before speaking. When I suggested this to the students, some of them agreed. Others, I suspect, were too polite to say so.

There is also a strong desire in me to be "a role model of the exemplary teacher" (Brookfield, 1990). This is physically, mentally and emotionally draining and ultimately counter-productive.

Personal

Working with the Intermediate Literacy Class had a significant impact on my life. While all of us were students in the class, what I learnt had a profound effect on my thinking and attitudes. As I came to know the students, I questioned my assumptions about my place and importance in the world. I questioned my values and lifestyle and decided to make some long-overdue changes.

I also gained a greater knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues and the effect white settlement had and continues to have on Aboriginal lives and culture.

Cherie de Pinna

REFERENCES

Beattie, P. (1995.). Teaching Notes from the Special Teaching Unit. No 3. *Deconstructing a print text with students.*

Beattie, P. (1995). *Digging Deeper. Text Analysis as a Strategy in the Teaching of English Literacy to Adult, Non-Urban Aboriginal Students in the Northern Territory.* Master of Education thesis. Northern Territory University.

Brookfield, S.D. (1990). *The Skilful Teacher: on Technique, Trust and Responsiveness in the Classroom.* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Flanigan, M.C. (1986). Collaborative Revision: Learning and Self-Assessment. In *Literacy, Society, and Schooling: A Reader.* pp 313-320. Edited by S. De Casteli, A. Luke, K Egan. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Osmond, P. (1990). The why, who, what and how of assessment. *Good Practice in Australian Adult Literacy and Basic Education.* No.7, pp 1-2.

Searle, J. (1991). Participant observation. *Good Practice in Australian Adult Literacy and Basic Education.* No.13, pp 3-4.

Shore, S (1991). Answers for the teacher. *Good Practice in Australian Adult Literacy and Basic Education.* No.13, pp 8-9.

Shore, S., Black, A., Simpson, A., Coombe, M. (1993). *Positively different guidance for developing inclusive adult literacy, language, and numeracy curricula.* Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

Watson, H.J., Vallee, J.M. and Mulford, W.R. (1981). *Structured Experience and Group Development.* Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.

Wilson, J.G. (1995). Assessment: a classroom teacher's point of view. *Network Notes: News from the Adult and Child Literacy and ESL Research Networks.* The National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia. Issue 8, pp 1-2.

Appendices

STUDENT REPORT

Meat Raffle Report - 4/9/1995

by
Jack Williams
with contributions from
Ernie Bond, Carmel Burke, Richie Charles, Donna Newley,
Belinda Ross, Jimmy Smith (tutor), Henry Thompson,
Robert Turnbull and Dana White[1]

Background

The Intermediate Literacy Group, from the Indigenous Peoples' Unit, formed a social club which they called the Intermediate Social Club (I SC). The social club decided to hold a raffle. It was decided to have a meat tray. The money from the raffle is for a get-together at the end of the year, as this is the easiest way to make money.

Discussion

The class nominated a committee consisting of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, treasurer and Board of Committee. The ISC voted that each member contribute two dollars each to start the raffle off, from which the treasurer bought the two books of tickets, which contained one hundred tickets each. It was decided to sell each ticket for one dollar.

The treasurer opened a bank account to put in the profits after expenses. The social club bought a meat tray for $20; the club now has $72.50 in the bank. One of the members had an idea of making up some posters for advertisements to tell other students of our raffle.

The organisation was first thought of on the 7th August. The raffle was to be drawn on the 1st September, but as all the tickets were not sold, it was decided to draw it on 7th September. The raffle was run only at the Indigenous Peoples' Unit at the Kangaroo Point College.

Recommendations

(i) It is recommended that the people who are selling tickets bring them in on the due date.

(ii) It is recommended that the names of all the people who took books to sell be recorded, so it can be known which books are outstanding.

(iii) The prize will be on display, if it is suitable.

(iv) The ISC is going to have fewer tickets for sale, which might mean a rise in the price of each ticket.

Conclusion

The ISC could have organised the raffle a lot better. There were a few books of tickets outstanding. It started with $23.50, the meat tray cost $20.00, which means the ISC has sold seven books at ten dollars a book. The total now in the bank is $72.00.

Students' Comments About Raffle

We thought that the first raffle was successful because we made some money for the end-of-year "bash". We worked very well together to make it a success. One of the members made a poster to put up on noticeboards around the College. We decided we would run a raffle again, with a larger prize. We also thought the raffle was a success because we made a profit.

Note:

1. All the authors mentioned by name agreed to have the report published and their names included.

STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

Below are students' responses to a series of questions raised by me when evaluating the course. This was a round-table discussion at which I took replies in shorthand. Ten students were present.

- *What did you think of the physical layout of the classroom, i.e. desk arrangements ?*
  (The desks were set up in a square)

Excellent. It gives a round table effect. It means there's good eye contact. People change rooms according to how they want them.
Better this way than all in lines in rows. Communication runs more smoothly, because it is like this. It's all open. There's a more open feeling.
It depends on where the teacher's comfortable sitting. It's better for seeing the teacher, because none is in the way. It's better than looking at the back of peoples' heads, and they don't have to turn around and talk to you.
It made us feel as if we mattered. We were more in a group. You can read the teacher's face. You can look at the faces of the others and see what they're thinking.
It breaks down the barriers. We didn't care where we sat. When I first arrived, I felt comfortable sitting anywhere.
It's a good way to relate to Murri people. It makes people feel they're connected.
I'm happier looking at people, whereas Murris tend not to do that. It's more conducive to looking at people in the eye.

- *What were the advantages/disadvantages of the meetings?*

Advantages:
Experience
The class got to voice opinions. We got experience in being a secretary and taking notes. We're going to have to do it one day, and we'll know what to do. We're learning meeting procedures. We flow through the meetings now. It means we feel more confident within the jobs we have to do.
Because it's a classroom thing, and being Murri, we're a family. We're more than just a classroom of Murri people.
"Brothers and sisters". It's a feeling of "oneness". A particular group of Murri people is going to be a family.
We talked about other issues other than the raffle.

Disadvantages:
None.
There's no disadvantages in learning something different.
There weren't enough people putting in their input, but this is personal.

- *Were the journals/exercise books useful?*

Good
It means we were able to look at what we learnt.
We could look at mistakes.
I'd recommend we keep a journal.
People aren't handing in bits of paper.
Tops (thumb raised).
You can keep notes together. We can remember what we're doing.

Tops (thumb raised).
You can keep notes together. We can remember what we're doing.
Splendid idea. It met the requirement that we needed, it kept everything together.

- *What did you think of the after lunch exercises?*

We didn't have them for long enough (they only had two sessions).
It'd be good to continue them, but allow us time to settle in after lunch.
We like the idea of having exercises.

- *What did you think of the class making up rules?*

Good. Good idea,
It encourages confidence and self-esteem because you're able to relax. It encourages people to talk. Everyone tried to encourage ... (a student). It's a genuine caring for each other. We're helping one another. It's helping us move forward. We encouraged people to find confidence in themselves. We made the rules not to intimidate but to encourage people. Murris have a tendency to jeer. "Don't laugh at people and respect others" were important points (in the rules). These are important to break the mould.
They made us all equal.
We feel more comfortable because we're at home and can come out of our shell.
You're doing something yourself and not following rules set down by TAFE, but making our own meant we respect them a lot more because they come from our own decision-making. This means people are going to learn.

- *If another group was doing this subject, are there other things you would cover?*

Do shorthand as an elective.
Typing
Thesaurus
Verbal communication
Role play, like the interviews. We need to know how to relate to people at different levels. We need confidence building and self-esteem. We need activities to overcome feelings of inferiority and how to cope when they're intimidating you. We need to learn more about stopping the effect that people have on us. We need to take control of the conversation. We need more role plays on how not to let people intimidate you. (This was during a discussion about how government employees intimidate the students and talk to them very badly.)

- *General feedback and comments were offered rather than grading. What did you think of that?*

Good
Grading makes us feel a name in the book and not personal communication.
If you're talking in general comments, we get more out of it.
You learn more. You get on top of problems. You're more acceptable to be open to criticism than given a grade in a book with a mark. There's a grading system within the unit, in that students are divided into Basic, Intermediate and Advanced.
I prefer it (the comments rather than the grading). It makes me feel better about things.
Your comments make me feel better. You wrote, "Your writing is so neat it's a pleasure to read." This made me feel good.
It's more acceptable to us. Positive comments make people feel good. You let us know when we've done something right, which means we're more open to constructive criticism.
No students would be here if you had us sitting in rows, grading our work and talking to us.

You get no feedback from the teacher and then at the end of the semester you get a mark and a comment in the book. I throw it away. It doesn't mean anything to me.

- *What did you think of the outings?*

Great idea.
It took us out of the classroom.
We still learnt things.
It's good for class morale.

ARE LITERACY AND NUMERACY COMPETENCIES ACHIEVED BY NEWSTART CLIENTS TRANSFERRED TO THE CLIENTS' REAL-LIFE CONTEXT?

Maureen Cooper and Susan Garside

Introduction

In September 1995, the Literacy Language Centre of the Bayside Campus of the Moreton Institute of TAFE applied for and gained funding to conduct research into the transfer of literacy and numeracy competencies from the college learning environment to clients' real-life contexts. The study was undertaken in a "Newstart" course at the Bayside Campus of the Moreton Institute of TAFE. Newstart is a full-time [200 hour] course for those unemployed people referred by the CES who need, in particular, to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. It is an access course which also includes computing, industrial knowledge, personal development and can be linked to other vocational courses. It might also be known in other contexts as a Special Intervention or Labour Market program.

The aim of the project was to determine whether competencies achieved during the Newstart program were transferred to other contexts.

We conducted this research project by asking questions in an informal interview situation of:

1. Students who had completed at least one course
2. Teachers of the course
3. Employers, supervisors and a CES Case Manager.

Students' questions related to the use of the competencies that they had achieved by the end of the course. They were asked to describe incidents where the knowledge, skills and attitude learnt on the course were, or were not, put into practice successfully. Were they able to transfer their competencies from the learning environment to their real-life contexts of work or community?

Teachers, employers, supervisors and the CES case manager were asked to talk about the culture of their workplaces and expectations they had of students/employees. They were further asked to comment on knowledge, skills and attitudes specifically related to the learning outcomes of the course.

Other anticipated outcomes of the project were information about:

The reasons for lack of transference if applicable

The clients' perception of their ability to use their stated competence

Clients' thoughts on competency based training and the curriculum used for the Newstart course [Certificate in Vocational Access, CNL03 - Employment focus].

We also considered the skills that are needed to enhance transfer.

The research was prompted by practitioners' questions. Teachers assessing literacy and numeracy competencies using the CNL03 curriculum wanted to know if the competencies were being transferred to the clients' real-life contexts. Was their rating of students as competent applicable to another setting? These questions suggest that teachers doubt that students can always transfer stated competencies to another context and they feel that this impacts on their credibility as teachers. If students tell employers that they have been assessed as competent at a certain task but cannot perform the task in the employer context, what does it mean to be assessed as competent after a course?

The CNL03 curriculum, accredited in February 1995, uses competency based assessment. In the Employment focus there are six literacy and six numeracy modules at progressive levels. In addition, there is one module covering workplace awareness, which includes workplace health and safety, understanding workplace change, award restructuring, the use of technology and human resource issues. Each literacy module has six learning outcomes [LO] which reflect the six aspects of the National Framework of Adult English Language. Literacy and Numeracy Competence. These six aspects are: personal, co-operative, systems, community, procedural and technological communication.

At whatever level the student is working, the first learning outcome of the Literacy modules concerns the students' use of literacy texts in relation to their own personal identity, for example, identifying and recording personal goals, writing personal details on forms. Learning outcome 2 relates to co-operative communication in the form of group interaction skills. This might include an oral recount to a group, receiving instructions from a supervisor or being an active participant in a team situation. The use of texts specific to organisations/systems such as the workplace or the CES office are the focus of learning outcome 3. Relevant activities are reading and responding to job cards, safety instructions at work or an internal memo. The fourth learning outcome relates to the students' interaction with the community, in such situations as, taking phone messages, asking questions or giving a vote of thanks at a meeting or reading and responding to an article in the local paper. The use of procedural texts is the focus of learning outcome 5 and might include, following safety instructions, operating a machine by reading a manual or explaining the procedure to complete a particular task. Finally, learning outcome 6 is about the use of technology, whether it be a fax machine, computer or the telephone.

In the numeracy modules, outcome 1 covers mathematical operations used in everyday situations. The second outcome incorporates measurement in height weight, capacity, length and time and the third outcome relates to shape and position. The latter covers location of a book in a library or getting to a bus stop. The final learning outcome [which is not included in the first module] concerns the graphic representation of data and might include reading a street directory or identifying the correct dosage of medicine.

With the implementation of the CNL03 curriculum teachers feel pressured to work towards students achieving competence in the 6 learning outcomes in each literacy module and in the 3 or 4 learning outcomes in each numeracy module. They feel that, in working toward a successful completion of the assessment tasks, they do not have time to ensure that students have sufficient practice to achieve a genuine understanding of the concepts involved in each learning outcome.

Teachers are aware of the time that needs to be spent working with students in the affective domain in order to develop confidence to carry out tasks but they feel that they do not have the time to do this. They know that competence in a skill in a familiar supportive environment is quite different from being able to perform the same skill in an unfamiliar, less supportive environment and the ability to transfer learning is often associated with confidence [ACAL 1992].

The pressure for teachers does not come from the Adult Literacy field which has always recognised [and specifically campaigned] that adults take a long time to achieve literacy competence at their desired level because of their lack of self esteem and low self-confidence. Nor does it come from the curriculum, which is in CBT format, and therefore operating on the principle that competencies can be achieved in whatever time it takes, two weeks or two years. The pressure comes from an administrative source, CAPS [College Administration Programs], which has to record specific learning outcomes against courses. This reflects a system where evaluation of programs is tied to successful course completion, that is, achievement of competence in all learning outcomes, in the nominal time specified. However, successful course completion in access courses may well mean that the student stayed in the course for the duration but achieved no specified competencies. Further, the student may say that the course changed their whole attitude to employment and training and yet, in not achieving competence in all 6 learning outcomes they are deemed "not yet competent" and by present criteria not having successfully completed the course.

Research on transfer of skills

Human behaviour is significantly influenced by the settings in which it occurs and it cannot be assumed that competencies acquired in one context will be transferred to another.

Billet [1994a] writes that;

> The provision of learning experiences that promote robust and transferable knowledge and skills is an enduring goal of educational practice. How to secure this goal remains the source of much debate, research and theorising. [p4]

Various factors influence the successful transfer of skills and context is of major importance. Literacy is significantly influenced by the settings in which it is used as it is socially constructed and specific to each context in which it is found [Luke 1988, Wickert 1991]. This means that the context of the college will generate certain literate behaviours which may, or may not, be appropriate for the context of work, home or job-seeking. Diehl and Mikulecky [1980] have found on worksites that on-the-job, extra-linguistic cues help workers to achieve more successfully than their general "reading ability" would suggest, demonstrating that literacy is embedded in the context of the work situation.

Mikulecky and Strange [1986] quote Sticht who comments that the US Army discontinued general literacy training to focus on specific job literacy because of the low transferability of general reading skills to specific literacy tasks in the military. Mikulecky and Strange [ibid] found that programmes they studied which addressed specific job literacy improved trainees' abilities in these areas, but that there was little transfer to general reading ability, unless the participants did a lot of general reading at home. Successful work based literacy programs used job simulation as the major training device, they had high time-on-task and participants had individual attention and feedback.

In relation to competency based training, Thompson [1993] states that to assume that transfer occurs ignores research that says that performance is highly task dependent and generalisations from task to task are limited. Melton [1994], writing about the impact of standards of competence in the form of National Vocational Qualifications in British industry, states that;

> . . . it was hoped that competencies developed within one context would transfer to other contexts within the same occupational area. Although such transfer may happen readily in very simple, closely related situations, in most cases some further knowledge or skill will be needed to facilitate transfer. [p291]

In vocational programs there must be a balance of knowledge, skill and attitude if there is to be maximum transfer of technology [Tedesco 1991]. The ability to recognise common factors and use other information to deal with a new situation will enhance the likelihood of transfer taking place. Oates [1992] examines the relationship between research work on transfer and curriculum initiatives designed to promote transfer. He sees transfer involving "change or adaptation" of existing skills or constructs. He writes:

> The extent of that change and the way we manage that change thus determine the extent and the speed with which we can learn to perform in that new task/situation. [p232]

Constant modification of skills and strategies is needed in work and everyday life, and one way to assist this modification is to provide individuals with an understanding of the contexts in which their skills were originally developed and of other contexts in which they might be subsequently used [Melton 1994].

ACAL [1992] states that if transfer of learning is an important outcome then training in transfer should be incorporated as a skill within the training. It suggests that students are given practice in thinking through the adaptation of ideas to different applications and that ability to transfer learning is identified as a required learning outcome. Mikulecky and Ehlinger [1986] found that instructional activities which increase metacognitive awareness should be incorporated into literacy programs as use of the metacognitive aspects of literacy consistently and significantly correlated with job performance. Melton [1994] cites a 'meta-competence' described by Fleming. This provides individuals with a 'critical, adaptable perspective on, and ability to manipulate, one's own competencies', similar to the metacognitive awareness described by Mikulecky and Ehlinger [1986].

With competency based assessment, we may be claiming that individuals possess skills that they do not in fact possess. Watson [1994] states there is a fundamental problem in making valid judgements about real-life competencies on the evidence of one successful performance of an assessment task in a college setting. ACAL [1992] further comments on the effect of attitudes and personal attributes in the demonstration of competency. As Norton [1991] points out there are a myriad of complex and interrelated skills involved in using literacy effectively, and competence depends on interest, attitude, prior knowledge, purpose and all those affective areas that are impossible to measure in CBT format.

The literature indicates that there are many factors to consider in the transference of competence which are much more than just the acquisition of literacy skills. This lends weight to the teachers' concerns that initiated this research.

Design of the Study

The 10 participants for this project, 4 female and 6 male, were Newstart clients who had achieved competencies working with literacy and numeracy modules in the CNL03 curriculum. They were all clients referred to the Bayside Campus by the CES, for full time literacy courses in 1995 and who met the following criteria:

- completed the course and therefore had achieved some competencies [Three others did not complete the course]
- were contactable on phone numbers given on their files [Some clients had left the district and others could not be traced. Six clients were in this category]
- had time to attend an interview [One person was working full time and also had a job at night and therefore felt unable to give time to the project].

Only 4 clients who had completed the course and who could be contacted were not interviewed because of time constraints.

The participants were long term unemployed [usually for 1 year or more] persons who were registered with the CES. They were initially interviewed by the CES and recommended for a literacy assessment. As a result of this one hour interview, at the Bayside Campus, the participants were then invited to attend a full time course of 200 hours [Newstart]. These courses run each term for approximately 10 weeks on 4 days each week, from 9am to 3pm.

The participants were recommended for courses at levels 1.1 or 2.1 [beginner or developing literacy levels] and 1.2 or 2.2 [beginner or developing literacy with a vocational emphasis] on the ILCM [Interim Literacy Course Matrix] and were therefore enrolled in CNL03 in the appropriate modules from LIT101 to LIT 103, NUM101 to NUM104 and all students were enrolled in LIT104. Class size was approximately 10 students.

Ages of the participants varied from 17 to 45 years and, at the time of the project, their employment status was varied.

- Two of the participants, one male and one female, both in their 20s, are now employed full time by local councils, one is on a traineeship and the other on a CES job skills program.
- One participant gained a full time position on leaving the course, but injured his back. He

is now working part time whilst looking for another full time job.

- Another participant is working as a volunteer at a local state school where he is in charge of a group of children one afternoon a week. He works with the children in the shade house propagating and repotting plants. He also assists the groundsman with jobs around the school and does casual work.
- Two male participants in their early 40s [who had been employed for about 20 years] are still currently unemployed and looking for work. One has completed a short permaculture course since leaving the Newstart program and is currently attending a part time literacy course.
- Four of the participants are currently in a second Newstart program. One of these participants is working full time on afternoon shift and the other three have a days work experience each week.

Communities of Practice

Since literacy is significantly influenced by the contexts in which it occurs the context of the college and the clients' context of use outside the college were studied. These contexts are described as "communities of practice" [Billet 1994b]. A community of practice is a set of relationships that exist amongst participants within that community and the community's relationship with other communities of practice. Communities of practice are distinguished from each other by the activities that take place within them. Formal learning institutions also possess a strong set of cultural practices which are associated with the goals of that institution and for this reason the Bayside College was studied as a community of practice. The norms and practices of each community were considered in order to assess whether transfer was 'near' or 'far' since this could influence the likelihood of skills being transferred. Near transfer is between situations that are similar but far transfer refers to situations that do not have many similarities [Royer, 1979, cited in Billet 1994a].

The contexts of the college environment, 3 worksites and the CES were studied by interviewing the teachers involved with the Newstart program, supervisors at worksites of participants employed and a case manager at the CES. A supervisor at a commercial worksite was not available for interview as he could not spare the time in the lead up to Christmas. However, he did agree to a brief telephone interview. Another participant employed in private industry indicated that his boss would not be involved in such an interview as work time must be spent productively.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

As literacy is specific to each context in which it is found, a descriptive study [Gay 1987] was considered the most appropriate form of research.

Ideally, an observational study may have been the best approach but this technique was not used due to the time required to establish a comfortable relationship with all the participants in a community of practice before meaningful data could be collected.

Interviews were used to collect data from the participants themselves and from major participants in their communities of practice. These semi-structured interviews lasted up to one hour. A tape recorder was not used as it was felt that this could have made participants less relaxed and less frank in their discussions. One researcher asked the questions and the other recorded the information including some verbatim quotes. The recorder also asked an occasional question. Having both researchers present acted as a check on bias. When both researchers could not be present someone else took over the role of scribe. All interviews were typed the same day which ensured that notes were critiqued accurately.

Data collected at these interviews from the course participants concerned their use of the literacy competencies achieved on the Newstart course in other contexts, that is, at work, at home or when visiting the CES office. The data collected from teachers, supervisors, employers and the CES case manager provided information on the different communities of practice.

Interviews with students were conducted in a small room where most of the participants had been interviewed prior to beginning the Newstart course. The participants sat in comfortable chairs alongside the researcher asking the questions. The researchers had a good relationship with the participants as they had worked beside them at times during the Newstart course although not in a teaching role. The interviews were informal and the frank responses indicated that participants trusted that information given was confidential. The interviewer was sensitive to participants' reactions to certain questions and proceeded accordingly.

Interviews with teachers were conducted in the college and interviews with supervisors, employers and the CES case manager were conducted at each worksite.

Triangulation, "the use of two of more methods of data collection" [Burns 1990 p249,] was used in the study to improve the validity of the data. Quantitative data were collected from participants regarding their perception of their ability to use the competencies achieved in the Newstart course in other contexts. Participants rated their ability on a three point scale. The semi-structured interviews also addressed similar information but not in the form of such overt questions.

Where access could be gained to the worksites of those in employment, interviews with supervisors provided information about the subjects from a different viewpoint.

Construction of the interview guide

In order to obtain comparable data, interviews should be conducted in essentially the same manner [Gay 1987, p203]. The interviews were semi structured, with structured questions followed by clarifying, unstructured questions that encouraged interviewees to elaborate on their initial responses.

Two interview guides were prepared, one for the participants of the research and one for the teachers of the Newstart course, the supervisors at worksites and the CES case managers. The latter interview guide gave information about the different communities of practice. The two interview guides had certain similarities in that they both elicited information about the contexts of operation of participants [see Appendixes A & B].

Interview guide for participants

In constructing the interview guide for the participants the validity of self-reporting was considered.

Self-reporting is often questioned as it has been claimed that verbal data can be founded on opinion rather that actual events or changes in behaviour [Billett 1994b]. For this reason a critical incident approach was used to increase validity. Participants were asked to recall actual events in the workplace, home or CES office where they had used reading, writing, numeracy or communication skills learnt and practised on the course. We anticipated the recall of these incidents would provide evidence of whether those literacy/numeracy competencies which had contributed toward the achievement of competence in the learning outcomes were able to be used or transferred. They were asked to recall a time when "things went really well" , a time "when they had a problem to solve and they did something about it" and a time "when things did not go well". These three questions provided an opportunity for participants to give evidence of their ability to transfer competence, to modify and adapt a skill to a new context or be unable to transfer competence.

The participants were also asked to state how the Newstart course had prepared them, or not prepared them, for work or looking for work.

They were asked to think about the settings of college and work, home or the CES with consideration given to the performance of tasks, relationships with peers, supervisors and teachers, and the responsibilities of each setting, to allow consideration of near or far transfer.

Participants were also asked to rate on a three point scale their perceptions of their current competencies in the learning outcomes achieved at the end of the Newstart course. This included both literacy and numeracy competencies.

Interview guide for teachers, supervisors and CES Case Manager

In this interview guide information was sought about the different communities of practice. This included: location and layout, the major participants and expectations of their behaviour with regard to performance of tasks, social interaction and the relationships between teacher/participant, employer/employee and case manager/job seeker. Information was sought regarding the values and concerns of each community both internally and with the broader community. The explicit rules of each community were also established.

The interview guides were trialed on a student and teacher before general use.

Results and discussion

Analysis of participant data

Confidence in using literacy and numeracy competencies

The quantitative data showed that all 10 participants in the study still felt confident about using the majority of their stated literacy and numeracy competencies.

The literacy competencies where some participants thought they might need help related to using texts from organisations/systems [LO3] and interacting with the community [LO4] where a written response was required. For example, filling in a complicated form, the example given was a driver's licence form, and writing letters where help would be needed with appropriate vocabulary, tone and spelling. One participant did not feel confident about reading some job seeking text. Participants responded to the question of confidence in these learning outcomes as "yes, with some help". They had some knowledge of what was required but were at the assisted stage of competence.

In numeracy, all participants felt confident about their stated competencies with regard to understanding shape and direction, including the use of maps, most measurement and reading timetables [those applicable to the subject's context of use] and simple graphs. The numeracy competencies where participants felt they might still need help related to numeration [LO1]. For example, understanding decimal fraction to hundredths and handling money in a real-life context. Another participant [7] commented on his confidence in operating with numbers to 20 as:

> It depends on how I feel. If I'm tired I'm not confident but with a clear mind it will come back to me. It depends on whether I'm tired or not as to how much I remember.

In relation to the learning outcome dealing with measurement, two female participants commented that they felt confident about the concepts of mass, capacity and time but they may need help with length. They stated that they used mass in food shopping, and capacity in cooking but they did not use length very much as they had little need to measure things accurately.

A male participant said that he did not always feel confident about weighing things at work. He described it in this way,

> When I weigh things up in kilos at work, at times I feel hesitant and I think what does a kilo look like? Then at other times metric measurement seems OK and then I feel good because I feel like one of the other workers.

This participant commented that his wife always did the shopping and he did not weigh things at home. In relation to these participant comments, are these gender or stereotyping issues?

One participant who felt confident that he would be able to demonstrate competence in all six learning outcomes in literacy and in the four learning outcomes in numeracy said,

> If I've got to do it I'll always try. If you stuff it up, so what, you'll learn something anyway".

This indicates that confidence is not only about demonstrating a skill competently, it also involves being willing to accept making mistakes as part of the learning process.

In contrast to this, a competent participant who felt confident with most of her achieved learning outcomes was still hesitant as to whether she would be able to demonstrate competence "out there", referring to an unknown context. She commented that for letters of application she had been marked competent "but I didn't believe I was competent. What do I do when I leave college? I'd panic and scream".

This participant said that her teacher had given her a procedure to follow in the form of a model for a letter of application in response to a CES job card or job advertisement. She said,

> I know I need to put:
>
> Date
> Their name
> My name
> Dear Sir/Madam
>
> 1st paragraph - a reference to the job you are applying for
> 2nd paragraph - who you are/what you can offer
> 3rd paragraph - list skills
> 4th paragraph - enclose resume and refer to availability for interview.

Despite being able to give this knowledge readily she still felt she did not have the skill to use it in a non-college environment, in this case, at home.

This indicates that the ability to transfer competence is not only about **having** the knowledge but it is about knowing **how to use** that knowledge and **having a belief in yourself being able to use** the knowledge in an unfamiliar context. She further said; "I want to be told I can do a *particular skill in a real life context*".

One participant did comment that he had used the knowledge he had gained on the course about writing letters for job applications when being interviewed on the telephone. The participant described the result of this as reaching a collaborative agreement that the boss use him as a casual employee. This demonstrates an incidence of far transfer.

In addition, students need to realise that they won't always "get it right" immediately and they must be able to accept mistakes and learn from them. The participant rated her competence against the standard of being able to produce a letter of application, immediately, independently and perfectly. But, competence does not necessarily mean "getting the skill right first time". It might mean knowing the process to go through in order to get the final perfect copy. She had no real appreciation of the normalcy of multiple drafts, collaboration and acceptance of a perhaps less than perfect, final copy due to time constraints, for example.

When a literacy/numeracy event went well

Interviews revealed that all participants could recall a time when a literacy event went well. Examples of events were: completing a form, answering the phone and taking messages, numeracy skills of addition and subtraction involving money, communication skills when meeting people for the first time and using a computer.

Successfully completing a social security form was cited by one participant. She said the Newstart course had helped her because she had worked through forms, practised, seen, analysed and remembered forms.

> I'd adjusted to their language so it wasn't confusing. When I read the form I knew what they wanted. Before I'd freak out.

Three participants mentioned using communication skills as a time when things went really well. One described this in terms of answering the phone and writing down messages:

> I feel comfortable doing this and feel successful at it because we practised using the phone on the Newstart course and we were told how to answer the phone properly.

This is an example of 'near' transfer of skills as the participant was able to use the telephone and message writing skills practised on the course in another context.

The two other participants commented on their awareness of using communication skills when meeting people. One described this in terms of a successful job interview and the other on meeting a colleague in his new workplace. Both commented on using some aspects of the Newstart course to help them with this although they both said that practice in other social situations had also assisted them with communication skills.

The participant who cited using the computer said:

> I have used it [the computer] at home to help the children with their school work and have taught the youngest how to use 5.1. Mike, my husband, couldn't do merges and I could show him. I thought, I know something that you don't know. I felt great!

This is another example of 'near' transfer of skills as the participant had the same computer program at home as she had used on the course. The participant thought she was successful because:

> I had a great teacher and it wasn't as confusing as I thought it would be and I worked hard to understand the computer and understood it.

She said that the teacher provided a relaxed environment, she had a good sense of humour and made learning fun, techniques which will affect a student's attitude toward learning.

Another participant recalled an occasion when he had found reading and writing a lot easier since leaving the course but he felt that this was not only related to an improvement in skills, but also to the fact that what he had to read and write about [horticulture] was a topic he was really interested in, "I found it meaningful and really wanted to do it".

When you had a problem to solve

All participants, with the exception of one, could speak about a time when they had a problem to solve and were able to do something about it. Some examples given were: using spelling strategies, clarifying and confirming information, contacting a local member of parliament, keeping cool in a potentially explosive situation and talking things through instead of getting caught up in an argument.

One participant spoke about the need for clarifying and confirming information at work in order to know what job had to be done. He said that he had taught his mother and father to clarify and confirm and recalled that the teachers on the course all talked about clarifying and confirming information.

Breaking up words into syllables was a spelling strategy used by one participant when he came across a word in a letter that he didn't know. He described what he did:

> I suddenly remembered to break up words into syllables. That was wonderful because I didn't have to ring my wife up at work and ask her to spell a word.

This participant is currently working with an adult literacy tutor. He commented that on the course he gained the confidence to attack words using given strategies and working one to one with a tutor had reinforced this.

One participant described an instance when she had the confidence to phone her local member regarding a problem in her street. She said that she was able to do this because the Newstart group had visited the local council and they had been given information about their local member of parliament. In addition, they had practised telephone skills on the Newstart course so she felt well-prepared to make the call.

She commented that on industrial visits the teacher had taught students to introduce themselves to people they would never have approached in the past. "[The teacher] pushes you into situations and expects 100%". This participant felt that this was very good preparation for the future world of work.

Using communication skills to defuse potentially explosive situations was described by two subjects. One subject said:

> OK, yeah, this guy was doing this and that wrong, we started to talkabout it and he was yelling, then we sat down and talked about it and sorted it out.

The course had taught this participant to get along with everyone. He said that all the teachers all the way through the course encouraged this.

When things didn't go well

Not all participants could nominate an occasion when things did not go well. Three of the participants could not recall such an event, one of them stating that he only saw things as problems and then he would look for a way to solve them. He said:

> I don't let it worry me. When you're not worrying it's clearer so you can make better judgements and see how things are.

Some incidents nominated were: trying to complete complicated forms, a communication problem which arose because the participant was not aware of the protocol involved in the workplace and a lack of confidence in following through a job application.

The participant who said that things did not go well when she was trying to fill in a complicated form, was also the participant who stated that completing a form at social security was a time when things did go really well. Regarding the latter she said that this was because she had had practice filling in a variety of forms, analysing them, remembering them and using her visual memory. In the course she had practised filling in social security forms every fortnight. This indicates that she had gained the confidence and skills to complete a form she was familiar with but she was not able to complete a different form, that she described as complicated, and one she had not seen before. The social security form represented a 'near' transfer of skills but the other form required her to adapt her knowledge and skills and apply herself to an unknown context. This requires confidence and a willingness to attempt something that looks different.

Another participant had difficulties at work because he did not know the job situation very well or exactly what he should have been doing. His job was explained very quickly and he was left to get on with it. He said that he needed to feel more confident and should have asked for more information, but he had also decided that he needed time watching an expert and this was what he was going to do in his spare time.

One participant handed in her resignation at work over a communication problem she had with her supervisor. She described this as a personality problem. She identified that she needed to know how to deal with the problem instead of bottling it all up and in order to do this she needed to know the "chain of command" or the protocol to use in that specific workplace. She commented that at college problems were resolved quickly because the teachers were sensitive to what was going on and things were discussed before they got to crisis point. She had found it different in the workplace and said that it was important to know how to deal with conflict as people had to work things out for themselves. She said the course had not prepared her to deal with conflict although there had been a focus on communicating in teams.

Did the Newstart course prepare you for work or looking for it?

All participants could nominate at least one area in which the course had been valuable. Examples of these were: numeracy skills relating to money and metric measurement, telephone skills, the format for job applications, filling in forms, resume writing, communication skills, improved reading skills, being able to use a fax and photocopier and, most frequently mentioned, improved self-confidence and self-esteem.

All participants could readily give examples of using the skills they nominated which would indicate that some of the skills learnt were being transferred. For example, one participant said that now he would have a go at filling out forms, several participants said that they were now more confident using the telephone, another participant said that now he could measure in metric, whereas in the past he measured in feet and inches. This meant he could now go to the hardware store and order timber in metric measurement just like everyone else.

Another participant confirmed that she felt confident about using the skills she had learnt when she commented that, without the course, she would have been very nervous starting work experience. Because she had practised many of the skills she would be using, she thought work experience would be interesting and not overwhelming. [This participant was enrolled in a module at level 2a and was more competent in literacy skills than some other members of the group.]

The extent of a participant's preparation for work or for seeking employment was related to the level of competence that they were at when exiting the course. Those participants who exited at level 1a for certain learning outcomes, whilst feeling confident to use the competencies achieved using the skills identified at that level, eg. simple sentences, familiar vocabulary, still had difficulties with general reading and writing tasks in the workplace which encompass a range of skill levels in the one text. For example, whilst participants exiting at level 1a could complete their personal details on a form [LO1] they may have difficulty completing workplace forms requiring more information.

One participant said that he was still "not too crash hot at reading job cards"" and another who works in a chicken processing plant, commented:

> I feel a bit more secure about reading because now I try to read everything I see but I don't know what the specials are on the wall.

Another participant said that the course was the start of something for him. He didn't learn everything that he needed to know but now he knows that he wants to learn more and can learn more.

Another participant found that although she had practised writing formal letters on the course she was not prepared for writing the letters used in her workplace. She felt she was not prepared for *"putting words on paper"*. This comment supports the findings stated earlier, when participants were asked to state how confident they felt about using their achieved literacy and numeracy competencies. Participants felt they may need help with written responses [LOs 3 & 4] to ensure that they were using the appropriate vocabulary and tone in letters. However, no course can prepare students for all the possible contexts they may operate in, it can only provide them with strategies to use in different situations and establish an awareness of the contextual basis of literacy.

Apart from learning skills, one participant said that he had found the course helpful in developing a routine. He had had to get up early to attend the course regularly and he realised it was *"important to have a routine because 2-3 weeks after the course if you are not getting work you would slip back into the old habits, so I went out and got volunteer work and I fix people's cars"*.

Some comments about increased self-confidence that participants felt after the course were:

> The course definitely gave me the self-confidence and the self-esteem to get the job at the ... council.
>
> [It has] helped me in my confidence, brought the best out in me. There's still more that has to be pushed out. It has made me a better person by making me a more complete person. It has bought me over the top to the point of no return.

The data demonstrate that transfer of skills is taking place amongst the subjects interviewed. ACAL [1992] suggests that for transference to be successful students must be exposed to exercises where they practise using skills in simulated contexts. In addition, ACAL suggests that students need to be given practice at thinking through the adaptation of skills to different applications and this is most effectively achieved through group discussion. For the transference of skills that is taking place are these conditions being followed in the Newstart course?

Analysis of data from communities of practice - Bayside College

Interviews with teachers revealed their ideas about conducting the Newstart course. All the teachers aim to help their students increase their confidence, self-esteem and acceptance of themselves. They want the students to realise that it is alright to make mistakes and they can ask for more information.

The numeracy teacher [1] tries to foster independence and encourages students to persist and "struggle" with a problem before she assists, thus simulating the workplace where students and supervisors comment that the workplace demands employees who can work independently and show initiative, [communities of practice 1, 2 & 5]. She encourages students to talk about numeracy and ask questions to ensure understanding. The teacher uses group work and peer tutoring but also ensures participation of every member of the group by having all class members make presentations individually. Otherwise, some students will "sit back" and let others do all the work. She encourages students to recognise the strengths and weaknesses in themselves and others.

Teacher 2 aims to generalise skills by giving practice of the same skill in different situations thus modelling transfer. She commented on the importance of listening and speaking and spends time developing these skills.

Teacher 2 wanted students to *"feel okay about making mistakes and for them to feel they can ask for more information"*. This teacher also told students that *"if you want something you have to demonstrate that you want it and be prepared to stretch yourself"*.

Both teachers 1 and 2 encourage students to be responsible for their own direction and discourage teacher dependence.

Teacher 3 runs the class as a workplace unit, although sometimes this is broken for "chalk and talk". Students must arrive on time [punctuality was considered essential], behave and dress appropriately, consider others, use appropriate language, clean up at the end of the day and attend to lights and windows and so on. The class operates in a simulated work environment, in teams with a team leader. The teacher expects the older students to assist the younger students and possibly accept a leadership role. She sees role models as really important. This teacher is concerned that the environment can become "too comfortable" and she imposes change. In her interview she kept coming back to the conflict between making the students feel comfortable and the reality of the "outside" world. As one participant commented she *"pushes you into situations and expects 100%"*. Another participant said of the same teacher:

> She pushed me so much I got frustrated and angry. I was writing a letter of complaint and she kept insisting it had to be perfect. She pushed me hard.

It appeared that this was a new experience for this participant to be pushed to the point of feeling uncomfortable, but the teacher managed to get her to stick with it and the subject did receive a reply to her letter.

With regard to social behaviour amongst students on Newstart courses all teachers encourage co-operation and support and this is related to appropriate behaviour in the workplace [Learning outcome 2, group communication]. Tolerance and acceptance of differences amongst the group are promoted along with positive talk and positive self-talk. This creates an atmosphere of everyone being valued and everyone being important [Learning outcome 1, personal identity]. Students also have to consider the needs of teachers. Teacher 3 was concerned that students were coming into the staffroom and demanding time from staff so guidelines had to be established for behaviour.

Teacher 2 described this as *"an awareness of others and place, not abusing their relationship with teachers"*. The guidelines established regarding this issue were preparation for understanding and following the protocol of the organisation/system in which participants would find themselves [Learning outcome 3, systems communication].

Analysis of data from other communities of practice

What are your expectations of employees/clients?

Supervisors at three worksites [two councils and one manufacturing company] emphasised the need for employees to be able to work reliably and with minimal supervision. On two of these worksites it was essential to be able to work effectively as part of a team. One supervisor said, *"if a person cannot do this they are out because all work is carried out in three-man teams"*.

Working as part of an independent team requires workers to be honest, reliable and responsible and to follow tasks through to completion which often necessitates flexibility. All these qualities were mentioned as desirable by supervisors in other communities of practice. Inherent in working as an autonomous team is the need for time management skills, an attribute mentioned by two other supervisors. Working in a team and effective communication skills are incorporated in learning outcome 2, group communication.

The two council supervisors spoke of the need for employees to be able to communicate well with the public, because all employees are representatives of their councils and they must be seen as caring for the community [learning outcome 4, community]. Council employees also needed to know the protocols of their worksites [learning outcome 3, organisations/systems communication] in order to keep their jobs, for example, knowing the appropriate dress code, being punctual, "not taking too many sickies" , knowing who to approach when any problems arose and knowing the workplace's health and safety practices. Protocols of the school mentioned by the supervisor were: participant 3 being called Mr ... , knowing the appropriate dress code, using appropriate language and no smoking on school grounds.

The skills that supervisors required varied according to each specific community of practice. Both council supervisors commented on the need for employees to have good communication skills when interacting with the public, both on the phone and face-to-face. One council supervisor said that employees needed a driving licence and some knowledge of basic horticultural terms and tools. But beyond this, the council was willing to support employees in further training and did provide training in first aid, chain saw skills, literacy and basic computer skills. The other council supervisor was happy to assist participant 4 with her literacy skills where her work was for public presentation and further training programs were made available and supported by the supervisor. At the manufacturing worksite, everyone starting work is trained on the job. This training period could be from 2 to 3 weeks or 8 to 12 weeks. The supervisor commented that there was also a "heavy" induction period for fire evacuation procedures, emergency response procedures and workplace health and safety training, [learning outcome 5, procedural communication].

These comments by supervisors indicate that it is not the skills that employees possess that are always of prime importance but qualities in the affective domain that are always important.

Punctuality, honesty, reliability, responsibility, flexibility, the ability to work in a team with minimal supervision, productivity and time management skills were attributes frequently mentioned by supervisors as being required on worksites today. Supervisors stated that training was provided to give employees the skills to do the job [manufacturing worksite] or to increase skills and this is inevitable with multiskilling being the aim of most worksites today.

The expectations of the communities of practice are nearly all in the affective domain but assessing the affective domain in CBT is difficult.

These comments relating to the affective domain were fully supported by the CES case manager who said that *"attitude was more important than skills"*. However, he did state that he felt numeracy skills involved with the handling of money were important as a large number of jobs coming through the CES are in retail.

He explained how influential attitude was with regard to successful employment. He commented that the wrong attitude affected communication skills and said that a major complaint of employers was that employees can't see the consequences of not serving the customer well. Punctuality and reliability are essential for work and *"employers will give up skills for these attributes and then possibly train workers to pick up skills they are lacking"*.

These attributes of the affective domain are being included in the Newstart course used in this study as the teachers interviewed stated that they incorporated these practices into the course. Supervisors commented that participants 3 and 4 displayed many of these attributes. Participant 3's supervisor said that participant 3 demonstrated excellent communication skills, he worked independently, was responsible and was modelling responsibility to the children he was working with, and his time management skills were good. Participant 4's supervisor commented that participant 4 was good at following through projects and she was considered reliable and flexible as she was given the council car to drive to *"run around for everyone"*.

It is difficult to determine whether the ability to demonstrate these attributes is related to the Newstart course or whether these students came to the course with these abilities. However, from comments made by these participants it appears that at least some consolidation of these abilities took place on the course.

Participant 3 may be using some of the techniques modelled by the Newstart teachers because his own experiences of school about twenty years ago were not happy ones and were nothing like the way he is operating with the children he is supervising in his job. He said, *"When I was a kid my Grade 1 teacher used to pick me up and shake me by the ear"*. He commented that on the Newstart course everyone was expected to do their best and it didn't matter if you failed because someone was there to help you. He described the teachers as being more personal and their attitude infectious so that they made you want to learn, knowing there was always support there. He describes his role with the children as, *"To help them understand and learn about what they are doing"*.

Participant 4 felt that one of her responsibilities on the Newstart course was to get the work done for her teachers and this could be linked with her ability to follow through on projects. She described her responsibilities in her job as, working as quickly as possible, working well with others and always attending work. She also commented on the realisation that there is distance at work between supervisor and employee that no longer exists once you step outside of work hours [as described by teachers 2 and 3].

If the goal for competence is that it should be transferable [NRS, 1995] we need to know the skills which enhance performance in a wide range of settings. Oates [1992] cites the CASE project which identified the following key concepts as enhancing transfer. They include:

- cognitive conflict, which involves developing the ability to think by means of "struggling" with intellectual problems. This means creating challenges for learners which do not demoralise them through constant failure.
- reflection encouraging students to think about their own thinking [metacognition].
- bridging, which encourages a conscious approach to applying existing strategies to new situations.
- reasoning patterns which focus on certain types of reasoning such as giving probability values to cause and effect relationships, control of variables and finding equilibria.

From the data given by teachers and students, the Newstart program incorporates "cognitive conflict". Teacher 1 stated that she encouraged students to "struggle" with a problem before giving assistance and all teachers encouraged students to be independent which implies having to struggle with problems independently before being given help. Participants stated that teacher 3 created challenges for them by *"pushing them into situations and expecting 100%"* and whilst one participant found this very frustrating, she did not fail and in the end was pleased with all the effort she had had to make.

Teachers did not state that they encouraged students to reflect on their thinking although they may do this.

Whether bridging or reasoning patterns were used consciously by teachers was not explicitly stated, although teacher 2 did say that she generalised practise of the same skill in different situations which implies a modelling of transfer.

Teachers' and participants' thoughts on CBT and the curriculum used on the Newstart course [CNL03]

The teachers interviewed question the appropriateness of competency-based training in the Adult Literacy field. With literacy, there are so many factors to be considered other than just the acquisition of a skill. Competence depends on interest, attitude, prior knowledge and purpose and all those affective areas that are impossible to measure in CBT format [Norton, 1991].

Some students interviewed [particularly those identified exiting 2.1 or 3.1 ILCM courses] were glad to have learning outcomes clearly defined, to know the objectives and to have recognition for what they had learnt clearly itemised.

> I like the learning outcomes because it lets me know what I have to do.
>
> The learning outcomes for computers were good because they set goals to work towards.

> For me it was important to be marked J [competent]. Being marked J gave me the confidence to believe that I could do things, so that when I went to work I believed in myself.

Other students held the opinion that the learning outcomes didn't really reflect what they wanted to learn and were an impediment rather than an aid.

> The learning outcomes are hard to understand. I just want to know what jobs I have to do ....

> For myself, I wanted spelling ... and then there were all those 6 learning outcomes so that wasn't quite what I wanted.

As previously stated, the teachers were concerned that the competencies achieved in the course may be short-term competencies, completed confidently in the classroom, but not transferred to the workplace. Teachers spoke of trying to make students confident by assessing in as realistic and varied situations as possible, but also commented on many students' "teacher-dependent mentality" and the college's environment as being "too comfortable". Nearly all students spoke of their lack of confidence as being the greatest barrier to transferring the competencies learnt and gained on the course to "outside" real-life situations, although many did say that the course helped in building confidence.

Participants did comment on there being a pressure to complete the learning outcomes,

> [In literacy] we had to work hard to get all of them [LOs] and then we only did things superficially. I could learn things to get through but the next week I'd have to learn them all again to pass.

> I would like to spend more time on each new thing we learn to be really sure that I understand it.

> In class everything was rushed through. Once learnt, instead of spending time on a particular outcome we had to move onto the next.

The pressure to achieve specified learning outcomes was commented on by vocational students in a survey by Billett [1994a]. Participants said that they were more concerned with passing exams and completing assignments than learning what was required for the application of their skills outside of the learning environment.

When students feel that they have achieved learning outcomes but have not had time to consolidate these then this will affect their confidence in putting skills into practice. This is an example of the critical difference spoken of by ACAL [1992] between what a person **can** do and what a person **will** do. How is the teacher to know? Emotional and psychological impacts on performance are not measurable in CBT terms. There is a danger that, in accepting that literacy can be measured in competencies, we will be contributing to a misguided notion that becoming literate simply means acquiring certain skills that can therefore be named and measured.

Conclusion

From consideration of the quantitative results and the qualitative comments of supervisors, a case manager, teachers and students, a number of conclusions can be drawn about the transfer of skills from the Bayside College learning environment to the students' real-life contexts.

- Transfer of skills to some extent did take place for all participants. Incidents given of successful transfer most frequently related to 'near' transfer of skills, eg. filling in the fortnightly Social Security form, using the telephone, measuring in metric, using the computer. Transference was high where the simulated context was not at great variance to the classroom where skills were developed and practised and where there were few extraneous complications, such as an angry supervisor or a personal illness. This 'near' transfer of skills seemed particularly successful in numeracy areas such as measurement. This may be because the practical, concrete activities of the classroom were similar to those in real-life everyday situations and little adaptation of knowledge was required. In mathematical operations [LO1] there was sometimes a difficulty of transfer because the method was not presented in a recognisable format and, because of language, more variables are likely.

- Students felt confident about using the majority of their stated literacy and numeracy competencies but literacy competencies where participants felt they might need some help related to using texts from organisations/systems [LO3] and interacting with the community [LO4]. These learning outcomes represent 'far' transfer as they are concerned with reading and writing the texts of organisations/systems and writing letters of appropriate tone and vocabulary for different contexts. In 'far' transfer situations where the community of practice or workplace has a different expectation or standard from that learnt in the classroom then transfer of competence is obviously more difficult.

- Transference of competence to a new context requires knowledge, skill, confidence in one's ability to complete the task and a willingness to accept mistakes. The ability to transfer a skill, particularly in situations of 'far' transfer, involves the affective domain. It was apparent that some participants gave evidence of a greater ability to expect change, adapt to change, struggle through problems, employ strategies learnt to a variety of situations and use metacognitive skills to transfer existing competence to a new situation. As the CES Case Manager said, "It's all about attitude."

If the goal of competence is that it should be transferable [Billett 1994a, Coates and others, 1995], courses need to be structured to enhance performance in a wide range of settings. Educators need to be aware that they teach to transfer learning outcomes/competencies to different situations. Transference skills need to be taught alongside those competencies needed for the successful achievement of the learning outcome. Students must be given strategies to use to enhance the adaptation of skills to new contexts. The metacognitive skills of adaptation, reflection and resolution and the affective areas of interest, attitude and confidence are integral to true competence. Competence should not indicate or reflect a finite knowledge and skill but should be demonstrated as an enabling and empowering ability.

Maureen Cooper and Susan Garside
Bayside Campus,
Moreton Institute of TAFE

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who assisted with this research project and in particular the following people: The Newstart students, (the subjects of the research), who willingly gave their time to participate in the project. We appreciate their openness and frankness during the interviews. The teachers of the Newstart course, who were willing to share their goals and experiences of teaching. The workplace supervisors and CES case manager, who described their expectations of employees in work and of clients looking for work. Dr Stephen Billett, for sharing his experience of conducting research in workplaces and for his assistance with the planning of the project. Stephanie Gunn, for her friendly and efficient response to our requests for resources. Dr Joy Cumming, for her ideas and assistance in writing the final research report. The completion of the report owes much to the co-operation of all these people.

References

Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) [1992], ACAL Draft response to Mayer Committee proposal, Unpublished paper, cited in LAN 4112 Issues and Development in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Teaching, Reader, Perth: Edith Cowan University.

Billet, S. [1994a], Searching for authenticity: a socio-cultural perspective of vocational skill development. The Vocational Aspect of Education, Vol 46, No 1, p3-15.

Billet, S. [1994b], Situated learning - a workplace experience. Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education, Vol 34, No 2, p112-130.

Burns, R.B. [1990], Introduction to Research Methods in Education, Melbourne: Longman Cheshire Pty Ltd.

Coates, S., Fitzpatrick, L. & McKenna, A. [1995], National Reporting System (NRS), ANTA, Brisbane & DEET, Canberra.

Diehl, W.A. & Mikulecky, L. [1980], The nature of reading at work. Journal of Reading, Vol 24, no 3, Dec 1980.

Gay, L.R. [1987], Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application, 3rd Ed. Ohio:Merrill Publishing Company.

Melton, R.F. [1994], Competencies in perspective. Educational Research, Vol 36, no 3, Winter 1994.

Mikulecky, L. & Ehlinger, J. [1986], The influence of metacognitive aspects of literacy on job performance of electronic technicians. Journal of Reading, Behaviour, Vol XV111, no 1.

Mikulecky, L. & Strange, R.L. [1986], Effective literacy training programs for adults in business and municipal employment, in Reading Comprehension: from Research to Practice. Orsanu, J. (Ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Norton, M. [1991], Dilemmas, a positive approach. Unpublished paper delivered at ACAL Assessment Forum, 7.11.91.

Oates, T. [1992], Core skills and transfer: Aiming high. Educational and Training Technology International , v29, no3 p227-39.

Tedesco, A. J. [1991], Technology transfer, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Vocational Education and Training Association, Los Angeles, CA, Dec. 1991. ED342891

Thompson, P. [1993], Current research issues for the assessment of competence, The Australian TAFE Teacher, First Quarter 1994.

Watson, A. [1994], Three strategies for the assessment of competence, The Australian Teacher, First Quarter 1994.

WRITING AN ACTION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Peter Mountney

Introduction

A research proposal is a detailed description of a proposed study designed to investigate a given problem. It includes justification for the research questions to be examined, a detailed presentation of the research steps that will be followed in collecting and analysing the required data, a projected time schedule and a budget. Research proposals can be brief and informal such as those that might be submitted by a university student prior to the preparation of an assignment or they can be more lengthy and formal such as those which are submitted to government and other funding agencies. The purpose of this chapter is to outline how to prepare a simple research proposal for a study that will use an action research approach. That purpose seems straightforward but it does present something of a contradiction. Generally a research proposal outlines, fairly clearly and in advance, a series of steps that the researcher will follow in carrying out the research activity. Action research, on the other hand, is an evolving and iterative activity. It is difficult to predict in advance what the outcomes will be. Therefore an action research proposal is something of a compromise between the formal structure of a research proposal and the flexibility of action research.

In this chapter there is some description of what action research is but that description is very circumscribed and a short bibliography of action research "primers" is included for anyone who wishes to read more widely on the theory and practice of action research.

Action research is defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) as:

> ... a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the rationality and justice of their practices as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out ... . (p. 5)

The linking of the terms "action" and "research" highlights the essential feature of the action research method: trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching and learning. The result is improvement in what happens in the learning environment, and better articulation and justification of the educational rationale for what goes on. Action research is usually concerned with a local problem and is normally conducted in a local setting. Its primary concern is not whether the results are generalisable to other settings, although this may be desirable, and it is not characterised by the same kinds of controls usually evident in other categories of research. Whether the research is conducted in one classroom or in many classrooms, the teacher is very much a part of the process. Therefore the more research training action researchers are exposed to, the more likely it will be that the research will produce valid, if not generalisable, results.

Origins of action research

Action research has become increasingly popular as a form of inquiry over the last twenty or so years, not only in education but in a range of disciplines. It is generally acknowledged that Kurt Lewin originated the idea of conducting action research in the 1930's (Adelman 1993). It was used in contexts as diverse as integrated housing, equal employment opportunity, prejudice in children, the socialisation of gangs, and training for youth leaders. Lawrence Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England in the 1970's is closely associated with the "teachers as researchers" movement and Stephen Kemmis was among the early action researchers at the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) in Norwich. Kemmis returned to Australia to develop the idea further at Deakin University and linked into the two main sources contributing to the growth of action research in this country: the growth of school-based curriculum development and a growing professional awareness among teachers who were seeking new ways of working and understanding their work.

Action research and practice

Kemmis and McTaggart (1981) observe that to *do* action requires the following activities:

- to develop a *plan* of action to improve what is already happening,
- to *act* to implement the plan,
- to *observe* the effects of action in the context in which it occurs, and
- to *reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and so on, through a succession of cycles. (p. 7)

Zuber-Skerritt (1991) notes that the *plan* includes problem analysis and a strategic plan; action refers to the implementation of the strategic plan; *observation* includes an evaluation of the action by appropriate methods and techniques; and *reflection* means reflecting on the results of the evaluation and on the whole action and research process. The cyclical nature of the activities demonstrates that action research is not linear. Rather it builds on the issues that emerged in the preceding cycle(s) as part of a process leading to further inquiry.

Kember and Kelly (1993) prefer to add a fifth process that they identify as 'initial reflection' to the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle. Quoting Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) they state:

> Planning usually starts with something like a general idea. For one reason or another it seems desirable to reach a certain objective. Exactly how to circumscribe this objective, and how to reach it is frequently not clear. ... If this first period of planning is successful, two items emerge: namely, an 'overall plan' of how to reach the objective and secondly, a decision in regard to the first step of action (p. 5).

This action research cycle reflects a commonsense view of practice that is easily recognised by experienced teachers. Teachers regularly engage in a process of planning, acting on their plans and reviewing and evaluating their actions for subsequent modification of the plans. Therefore a research process embedded in this cycle makes more sense for teachers than one that uses concepts of null hypotheses, experimental groups, dependent variables and so on.

Action research is participatory. That is, it is research through which people work towards the improvement of their own practice. It is collaborative. That is, it involves those responsible for action in improving it, widening the collaborating group from those most directly involved to as many as possible of those affected by the practices concerned.

Action research does offer a link between theory and practice. It offers an alternative to the view that theory is the province of academics and, at best, is marginally useful for those engaged in the realities of practice. Action research involves practitioners in theorising about their practice through reflection on action. Existing theory can be used to understand and explain practice but, used in this way, it is not divorced from the realities of practice.

Finally action research is self-research. Action researchers investigate their own practice and not that of others. Thus it is the academic whose role in action research is problematic. Elliot writes:

> This does not mean that the movement necessarily excludes researchers from the higher education sector. But it insists that the value of their contribution lies in the extent to which they support the practical judgement of teachers, and increases their capacity to reflect systematically upon the complex situations they confront. The identification of problems for investigation, the methods of research employed, and the presentation of "findings" will all be executed through negotiation and collaboration with teachers. However, the future prosperity of the movement will increasingly depend on teachers grasping opportunities to conduct their own enquiries without external support (1981, p. 63).

Prideaux (1995, p.12) offers a set of principles underpinning action research that practitioners can adopt (or adapt) as ground rules for collaborative research studies. He notes:

1. All members are participants (no action research, no admittance).
2. Everyone is an expert. There are no privileged experts (hence no appeals to authority and, conversely, no claiming to be just a practitioner and not being involved in critique).
3. All members are equal in status and this is reflected in member-to-member communication.
4. All members are supportive of each other and this is reflected in member-to-member communication.
5. All members take a critical perspective and this is reflected in member-to-member communication.
6. The focus will be beyond that of individual and particular concerns.

A distinctive feature of action research is that those affected by the planned changes have the primary responsibility for deciding on courses of action that seem likely to lead to improvement, and for evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice.

Action research studies – examples

Diary-keeping and teacher development

Reflect

In order to record and reflect on their classroom practice, three literacy teachers initiated a study whereby they each diarised aspects of their classroom teaching activities. A diary is a very simple tool for gathering information which can be used to generate questions and to reflect on practice. It is non-intrusive because it does not require the assistance of an outside observer in the classroom.

Plan

Each teacher agreed to keep diaries for two of their classes per week for one semester.

Act

In compiling their diaries, the teachers combined a narration of classroom activities along with their reflection of those activities. What worked? What didn't work? What did the students respond to actively? Why? How could it be better next time? Individual diary-keeping was coupled with written responses and group discussion. Each teacher read the diaries of the other teachers and they wrote brief responses to each others' entries before their discussion period. Discussions were audio-taped and transcribed.

Observe

At the end of the semester, the diary entries, written responses and transcripts were analysed to determine how the three information sources interacted and what issues occurred most frequently.

Reflect

Diary-keeping was seen as a valuable activity in terms of describing aspects of teaching practice but at the same time the discipline of keeping a diary was time consuming. However the activity enabled the teachers to focus on improving their classroom practice and to gain a perspective on other teachers' experiences.

Self-study booklets

Reflect

A program in Workplace Health and Safety has been exploring an alternative to upfront classroom delivery by a presenter. The focus of the alternative approach has been the use of self-study booklets. It was felt that the use of self-study booklets would provide a more flexible delivery strategy that would be more acceptable to trainees.

Plan

Self-study booklets were prepared for one of the two modules of the Workplace Health and Safety program.

Act

Trainees attended one lecture a week for six consecutive weeks and covered the content of the first module of the program. For the second module, trainees were asked to read and complete the activities in the prepared self-study booklets. The material was self-paced but a time limit of six weeks was set for completion of the second module's work.

Observe

A written examination was a component of both teaching approaches. A questionnaire was used to evaluate the trainee's attitude to the alternative teaching and learning formats.

Reflect

The results were inconclusive. The examination results from the two approaches to teaching and learning showed no significant differences and the reactions of the trainees were mixed. Some favoured the flexibility of the self-study method; others favoured the classroom presentation method, and particularly for the discussion of the case studies.

Plan

Plans are in place to rewrite the case study components of the self-study booklets in order to eliminate the identified deficiencies and to incorporate suggestions made by the trainees from the first study. The study will be repeated with a new group of trainees.

(Cases adapted from Kember & Kelly, 1993.)

These are two simple examples of action research studies. Where possible or where appropriate, action research studies go through several cycles or spirals of the basic phases of the study. In the second example above, for example, aspects of the self-study booklets are being re-written for the next program offering and, based on further feedback, could be re-written yet again for subsequent offerings.

The phases of the studies as described above appear to be relatively straightforward but what occurs in reality is less clear-cut. Planning is generally not perfect and compromise and revision is often required. However, it is useful to describe each phase simply and separately in order to outline the action research process.

Writing the action research proposal

When writing a research proposal there are a number of issues that need to be considered and then addressed within the proposal. Firstly, there is the need to consider the purpose in writing the proposal which, to some extent, is different from the purpose in undertaking the research study itself. In writing a proposal, the researcher is demonstrating a capacity to design a research study that can be carried out successfully. In addition the researcher is "selling" the proposal. This "selling" might be to management for permission to undertake the study, to potential participants or to a funding agency. Usually there are more good ideas than funds available and choices have to be made. A well-drafted research proposal clearly has an advantage in attracting the reviewer's attention.

It is important for the researcher to show clearly that the proposal has been fully planned, that all the relevant issues have been considered and that the study has been adequately costed in terms of time and money.

Another issue to be considered in writing a research proposal is that no two studies will be identical and, therefore, no two proposals can expect to be identical. This is especially so with action research which is particularly tied to context. Each study will be designed to satisfy its own needs. Although the following discussion is based on generic components for research proposals, any proposal should be individualised to its particular context. Not all of the components may be necessary. There may be other components specific to a particular context that should be included. What to include and what to exclude are decisions that need to be made by the writer of the proposal.

In planning a research study and in preparing a research proposal, the researcher must ensure that the proposal represents a project that is "doable" and, particularly, within the constraints that will apply – money, time, available assistance, access to participants, access to sites and so on. It is important for the researcher to work with tools that can be readily accessed to achieve useful information. A small amount of valid data is much more useful than a scattering of unreliable, unrelated information.

Components of a research proposal

At its simplest level a research proposal aims to provide information to the person who will approve the research study on six basic questions:

What?
Why?
Who for and who about?
How?
How long?
How much?

Clearly the questions are all interrelated and often the "what" and "how" are dictated by the "how long", "who for" and "how much". Table 1 shows a summary of suggested components of a research proposal and how they address the six basic questions.

Table 1
Components of a research proposal

- Introduction *(What and why)*
  - Statement of the research problem or issue
  - Literature review
  - Definition of terms
  - Objectives or research questions

- Perceived audience and outcomes *(Who for, who about)*

- Method *(How)*
  - Brief overview of approach
  - Data sources (population and sampling)
  - Data types and collection procedures
  - Issues (eg. ethical) and validation procedures
  - Anticipated data analysis
  - Report format and content

- Human and physical resources *(How long and how much)*

The introduction

Generally speaking the statement of the purpose of a research study should be clear and succinct. If the reviewer cannot identify the purpose, it is impossible to determine if the methodology is appropriate. The statement should convince the reviewer of the proposal's value. It is also important to draw a ring around the problem so that it is clear what is included and what is left out. However, in an action research proposal some flexibility with regard to this requirement might be needed. Kemmis and McTaggart observe that:

> You do not have to begin with a "problem". All you need is a general idea that something might be improved. Your general idea may stem from a promising new idea or the recognition that existing practice falls short of aspirations (1981, p.18).

If the researcher is working independently this advice is fine but, if the study is to be approved and/or funded by other agencies, the "general idea" will usually need to be teased out to some extent. Key questions the researcher might address are:

> How important is the issue to the researcher?
> How important is it for the researcher's students?
> What opportunities are there to explore the area?
> Who might be interested in helping?
> What are the constraints – practical and political?
> How manageable is the task?

While generality beyond the local scene is not necessarily a characteristic of action research, it is a desirable feature of educational research and any anticipated generality should be described. The two action research examples cited previously were both specific to the participants/program in question but both are generalisable to some extent to other contexts. Any limitations to the research study should be clearly identified.

A brief review of the literature is recommended as a component of the research proposal. It will help to place the research study in context. No matter what the problem is, someone, somewhere, will have written something about it. By undertaking a brief review of the literature and related research, other perspectives, other issues or an appropriate methodology might be identified. Any terms that have a particular meaning and which might be unfamiliar to the reviewer should be defined.

The objectives or research questions should flow logically from the statement of the research problem. The objectives should be specific, achievable and operational and they should be consistent with the methodology.

The perceived audience and outcomes

In developing the proposal it is important to decide for whom the research study is being undertaken and what are the anticipated outcomes or products of the activity. There may be several stakeholders, for example, literacy teachers at a specific site, literacy teachers across the state, administrators and so on. There may be specific products developed as a result of the research activity, for example, manuals or diagnostic tools etc. How will they be disseminated? How will the benefits of the research be shared? These are important questions that need to be addressed.

Method

In describing the methodology there are a number of factors that need to be considered. Firstly, has the group which is the focus of the study been adequately described? Secondly, has a research technique that best fits the problem been chosen? The approach chosen will be dependent on the purpose of the research and to some extent the context. For example, is the study to be formative in nature such as the redesign of a more effective program? In this case an approach that will assist in identifying the processes needing improvement would be chosen. On the other hand, a study may be undertaken in a more budget-focused context looking to use the available funding more effectively. This would entail a more summative approach focusing on outcomes per dollar spent.

Action research is based on documented evidence and data will be collected from a number of sources. Any of the following are appropriate sources of data depending on the particular research study being undertaken:

- Anecdotal records and field notes
- Document analysis
- Diaries and log books
- Portfolios
- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Sociometric methods
- Interaction schedules and checklists
- Tapes, videos and photographs
- Tests of learner performance.

Each method has particular strengths and weaknesses and the researchers will have to decide which method or methods are most appropriate for the particular study in question. Multiple sources of data are preferable to single sources. In the first action research example given above, the sources of data included the diaries, the written comments and the transcribed discussion. These three sources offer a kind of triangulation process. This process of triangulation (much like a doctor calling for second and third opinions) attempts to confirm validity by comparing results obtained from different perspectives, using different data-gathering procedures.

Where data collection procedures might cause controversy, it is important that adequate consideration be given in advance to any necessary special provisions that might have to be put in place. For example have proper negotiations with those involved in the study been undertaken? Are procedures in place that will allow participants to negotiate with the researcher any written descriptions of their work before it is released? Where necessary, have explicit written authorisations been obtained?

Is there a realistic work plan? Is the sequence of steps clear and is there sufficient time allowed for each step? Preparation of a time line is a good indicator of whether the research study is "doable" and particularly in those cases where time constraints will operate. For example, allowing one week for preparing, trialing and administering a questionnaire is clearly unrealistic. Allowing one month for a small questionnaire to a limited number of people would be more appropriate. A complex questionnaire to a large number of people could take at least two months. The subsequent analysis and writing up of the data provided from the questionnaires requires a separate time consideration. Using a planning tool such as a Gantt chart or a PERT diagram can be a valuable component of a research proposal.

Human and physical resources

An action research study may be a small undertaking based in the classroom of an individual teacher and, as such, it would not be necessary to describe research experience or specialist qualifications in any detail. On the other hand there may be more complex research studies proposed which would involve specialist expertise. Clearly, in such cases it would be desirable to include in the research proposal brief statements of pertinent experience and qualifications of the researchers to be involved in the study.

In terms of physical facilities, does the proposal describe any special facilities and equipment that might be necessary? Are they available to the researcher when they will be required? If necessary, is there evidence of the co-operation of other agencies that might be involved.

Budget

Has an appropriate operational budget been outlined? The following is a fairly comprehensive list of the costs that you should consider when preparing your budget, although not all will be applicable in all situations. For example, the three teachers undertaking the diary-keeping study described above may not have salary costs associated with their study. In fact, their costs might be minimal and limited, say, to secretarial assistance for transcription of tapes and associated typing. However, typical budget items can include:

Salaries
Consultant's fees if not included in salaries
Costs of materials, eg. questionnaires, tests
Travel, accommodation expenses
Office supplies and overheads
Paper, postage, telephone, facsimile
Computing costs: data analysis, word processing
Printing costs.

It is important that realistic costs be determined. Too frequently the costs associated with salaries and data collection are underestimated because the estimates are based on tight timelines. There are a variety of adages on the theme of "what can go wrong will go wrong" and a prudent researcher should make some provision for unexpected timelags. Program participants do not necessarily have the same degree of commitment to the research study as do the researchers; they do not share the urgency; they have other priorities. People go on holidays; questionnaires get lost in in-trays; approvals aren't signed and returned as quickly as the researchers had planned. And so on.

Conclusion

The degree of detail needed in a research proposal is determined by the purpose for which it is being written. A research proposal prepared by a group of teachers for use in their own classrooms can be a simple document. If the proposal is to be submitted to management for authorisation to undertake the study, a more detailed document might be required to obtain permission and to justify the expenditure on the necessary human and physical resources. A research proposal being submitted to an outside funding agency and particularly if the proposal is in competition with other research studies for funding will need to be much more comprehensively described. Not only must it be done competently, it must also "grab" the attention of the reviewers. It doesn't have to be a big project but it should be innovative.

Peter Mountney
Griffith University

References

Adelman, C. 1993, 'Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research'. *Educational Action Research*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 7-24.

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. 1986, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. Falmer, London.

Deakin University 1988, *The Action Research Reader*, Deakin University, Geelong.

Elliott, J. 1981, Foreword. In J. Nixon (ed.) *A Teacher's Guide to Action Research*, McIntyre, London.

Funnell, R. (ed.) 1996, *A Handbook for Research in Adult and Vocational Education*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Kember, D & Kelly, M. 1993, *Improving Teaching Through Action Research*, HERDSA, Campbelltown, NSW.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (eds.) 1988, *The Action Research Planner*, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.

Prideaux, D. 1995, 'Beyond facilitation: Action research as self-research and self-evaluation'. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, vol 7, no. 1 pp. 3-13.

Stenhouse, L. 1975, *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, Heinemann, London.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (ed.) 1991, *Action Research for Change and Development*, Aldershot, Averbury.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. 1992, *Action Research in Higher Education: Examples and Reflections*, Kogan Page, London.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. 1992, *Professional Development in Higher Education: A Theoretical Framework for Action Research*, Kogan Page, London.

LANGUAGE
AUSTRALIA
The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia